

A KING'S RANSOM



A STORY OF YE ANCIENT HOUSE IDSWICH
IN YE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

A.J.

DF

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A KING'S RANSOM.



A KING'S RANSOM.

BY THE AUTHOR OF
THE MARTYRS OF
THE CORNHILL.

FOURTH EDITION.

W. E. HARRISON, THE ANCIENT HOUSE,
IPSWICH : : : : : MDCCCCIX.

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“ Now, true love
No such effects doth prove ;
That is an essence far more gentle, fine,
Pure, perfect, nay, divine ;
It is a golden chain let down from heaven,
Whose links are bright and even :
That falls like sleep on lovers, and combines
The soft and sweetest minds
In equal knots.”

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CHARLES II.

From an original portrait in the possession of the author.

A KING'S RANSOM.

CHAPTER I.

LONDON BRIDGE.

It was a brilliant afternoon, in the summer of the year of grace 1651. Even late in the day the August sun was intolerably fierce. Out in the open country, the work of ripening corn and fruit was almost done; here in London City, the rays beat down into crowded alleys and narrow lanes, and made them close and sultry, like streets of an Eastern town. But nowhere did the sunbeams rest more gaily than on the broad bosom of the river Thames. They shone upon the stately palaces and beautiful gardens with which its banks were lined, caught the edges of the leaves rustling in the breeze, and sparkled in a thousand lights upon the rippled surface of the water.

There was scarcely a view in all England which, for historic and picturesque interest, could equal the sight from old London Bridge. To the North rose the still graceful structure of St. Paul's Cathedral. The beautiful spire, for centuries the pride of the City, had been burnt down in the time of Queen Elizabeth, and an insignificant tower substituted for it. The South transept, designed by Inigo Jones, had been hastily pulled down by the Parliament for the sake of the scaffolding, and part of the Cathedral with it; and the interior had been sadly desecrated by the Puritans. Still, however, to outward seeming, the building was the noblest in London.

Close to the end of the bridge stood a confused mass of houses, the hall and offices, as we should now call them, of the Fishmongers' Guild. Somewhat shorn of

their splendour were these Fishmongers, since the rigid Puritan régime had abolished the demand for fish in Lent. One branch of their profit had been struck at, but in a great seafaring country like England, the Fishmongers were always certain to rank among the chief commercial Guilds.

Nearer the bridge the houses were crowded together in strange proximity. Further on, where the streets were wider and fewer, the river swept round in a grand curve, bound in, not by stiff embankments, or a ragged border of mud and rotting hovels, but fringed to the water's edge with a beautiful varied line of palaces, houses, gardens, and stately water gates, designed by the first artists in Europe.

The road stretched on to the twin town of Westminster, where the houses grew thicker again round the beautiful Abbey Church of Edward the Confessor. This noble street of palaces somewhat resembled the buildings on the canals of Venice, save that every house was embowered in trees. For in those days, when locomotion by land presented innumerable difficulties, the Thames was the great highway of London. Every house of the better class had its private landing place and boat, and the broad river was always covered with barges, wherries, gaily painted skiffs, and crafts of all kinds. On a fine summer afternoon, the citizens of London were accustomed to take the air on the river by hundreds.

In the distance, plainly visible across the streets and gardens, orchards and fields, which lay between, rose the wooded heights of Hampstead and Highgate, and Harrow beyond them, a conspicuous landmark for miles. From the London of that day to these outlying districts all was open country, and the same strange sight of trees and green fields stretched along the Surrey side of the river. For perhaps half-a-mile inland there were a few streets, but only one was continued in a straight, unbroken line, the great highway which ran to Dover and Canterbury.

Not far from the bridge foot, as the Southwark end of the bridge was called, was the splendid palace

of the Bishop of Winchester. He, poor man, like all his brother prelates, had fared badly in the rapid vicissitudes of the times. The Puritans, to whom Prelacy was only less obnoxious than Popery, had sent him about his business as soon as they obtained the upper hand. His Palace had been first turned into a prison by the Parliament, and then, the necessity being urgent for ready money, it had been sold, some two years before, to the highest bidder.

But the bridge itself was even more wonderful than the view from it. Not a wide, open space, with low walls and broad pavements : but a street of tall, narrow houses, with all the picturesque defects of the architecture of those days. It was supported by eighteen piers of different shapes and sizes, and upon these piers, or "starlings" as they were called, as many houses were crowded together as space would permit. These were mostly built across from side to side, a covered passage, as dark as a tunnel, being pierced through them, along which passengers painfully groped their way. One huge house, a fantastically carved wooden building, called Nonsuch House, had been erected upon the arches of the bridge, and common report declared that it had been brought over from Holland in pieces, and put together with wooden pegs. A little further on was an ancient chapel, curiously built into one of the buttresses, the basement of which could be entered by steps from the river below. Huge waterworks stood upon the northern end ; and at the bridge foot there were four corn mills, built out on stakes, and projecting far into the river

The bridge had this awkward peculiarity, that the houses were continually falling down, sometimes as many as forty at once. Considering the traffic, however, and the mass of buildings which, in the course of centuries, had accumulated on its piers, the wonder was, not that the houses occasionally fell, but that the whole colossal structure had not long since subsided.

To a casual observer, standing on the bridge that warm August afternoon, it might have seemed as if the

warlike deeds, which had often been enacted on it in former days, were about to be repeated. Some unusual agitation among the people was visible. The bridge was thronged with armed men hastening across it by twos and threes, or singly, up from the great Kent Road, and the various other ways which met at the bridge foot. Most of them were accoutred in leather jerkins, long heavy boots, and steel helmets. A few were fully armed with cuirasses, shoulder pieces, and greaves, while all had swords at their sides, and long pikes in their hands. Now and then a horseman clattered between the high, dark houses, with still bigger boots, and heavier breast-plate, and longer sword.

Upon the face of every man was a look of solemn determination. They were going to fight, these grim Ironsides, and to fight under the Lord General Cromwell meant to conquer; but not a feature betrayed their inward satisfaction. Yet they held their heads high, like men who knew their own worth. Time was when these Puritans had crept into holes and corners, or had been forced, cap in hand, to ask leave to live of their Cavalier opponents. Now, such of the Cavaliers as ventured to appear slunk along the streets, keeping out of sight as much as possible. But even these were few; for most of the Royalists were either up in the North with the Scotch Army, or lying hidden in their own or their friends' houses, trying, and often in vain, to escape the vigilance of their enemies.

All this commotion, on the bridge and elsewhere, was occasioned by a young man, scarcely out of his teens, known variously as the man of sin, Charles Stuart, the King of Scots, or spoken of by the Royalists with bated breath as "the King." Early in the morning of this day the news had flown through London that this youth, who had already by a bold stroke penetrated into England, was in full march with his army of Scots and Cavaliers for the Capital. The Lord General, who was following closely at his heels, had sent an express for every able-bodied man to arm and join him, and all the old Puritan soldiers were flocking up to London,

meaning to push on from thence into the Midland Counties, whither the tide of battle had turned.

In the centre of the bridge was an open space, formerly much used for lists and tournaments. It formed an excellent breathing place, where the passengers, emerging hot and stifled from the dark tunnel of the houseways, were glad to pause, and enjoy the fresh air which came up from the river. Here a couple of workmen were busily employed in examining and repairing part of the under structure of the bridge. A young man stood watching absently. He was tall and finely made, and his long hair and picturesque dress showed him to be one of the proscribed party of Royalists. Evidently much time and care had been bestowed upon the rich dark curls which fell over his shoulders, and his glossy moustache and small pointed beard were carefully trimmed after the fashion of the late "martyred" king. He wore a broad, plumed, felt hat, leather boots coming to the knee and frilled with lace, long gauntleted gloves and huge spurs; the rest of his dress was hidden under his riding cloak.

But one glance at his noble forehead and broad eager brow sufficed to show that he was no fop. He seemed, indeed, far too pre-occupied and in too great haste, to concern himself about the impression a Royalist might make in this hot-bed of Puritanism. For the last ten minutes he had been curbing his impatience with difficulty. Sometimes he peered restlessly down the lane of dark houses on either side of the bridge; sometimes he walked to and fro along the parapet, and looked down into the sparkling water below. Anon, he took up his station near one of the buttresses, and tried to school himself to patience by watching the men.

"A plague upon this job!" said one of them, lifting his ruddy face from a link of the chain he had been carefully testing. "Belike it will never be needed; the bridge will never be attacked. Oliver knows his work too well to suffer those malignant rogues to come thus far."

"Friend," quoth the other man, gravely, "thy speech

is ill-considered. Firstly, it savoureth not of the Gospel, but rather of that profane sin of swearing. Secondly, thou hast spoken lightly of dignities, and Holy Writ saith we should give honour to those that are set in authority over us."

"Out upon you, Master Jeremiah!" returned his companion, testily. "What harm lieth in my words? An I said, 'A plague on't'; I meant but to signify the plagues of Egypt. And verily 'tis a plague of Egypt to work in this heat."

"Grudge not thy labour for the Lord's elect," said the second workman. "Did not worthy Master Full-of Love Stivers bid us, at the last monthly fast, 'whatsoever we did, to do it unto the Lord'? And, prithee, how wouldest thou be better occupied than in labouring to keep those accursed malignants out of the Lord's City of London?"

"To keep them out, say you? Why, man, they stand at our very elbow," rejoined his irritable companion. And touching his arm, he pointed to the stranger, whom neither of the men had noticed. "Ay, look at that now. Think you we keep the wolf from the fold, while these same fellows prowl about our city? There's mischief within, and mischief without, I trow."

His fellow looked at the Cavalier. "And what, sir, might your business be?" he said, insolently, without doffing his cap. "We would fain know wherefore you examine us thus. We like not such close watching at our work."

The stranger started, and the blood shot up into his face, at being so familiarly accosted. His first impulse was to clap his hand to his sword, but the next moment he controlled himself.

"Friend, I do thee no wrong," he answered, mildly. "Doth your Christian charity forbid a man to look at you? May he not stand here awhile and take the air by the river?"

"Ay, if he be of the Lord's people, not otherwise," replied the man. "And he be one of your drunken ruffling, swearing malignants, let him not come hither."

Such an one is not fit to live. Away with him from the earth!"

None of these abusive epithets seemed applicable to the stranger, but the look of dignified contempt with which he met them appeared still further to incense the men. Laying aside their tools, they advanced towards him as if ready to carry their words into effect.

"Sir, we would have you to know," said the one, "that in the Lord's City of London we suffer none but the godly."

"A Papist, Master Jeremiah!" muttered the other. "Think you not he hath the look of a spy?"

"None of the accursed brood of Papists and Prelatists will we harbour here. Get you gone in haste."

"We are two to one. 'Twere easiest to throw him into the river, and make an end of him forthwith."

As good luck would have it, a fourth person intervened in what threatened to become a dangerous street fray.

"Forbear!" exclaimed a voice from behind, and a hand was suddenly laid upon the Royalist's shoulder. "Thou art here, Ralph! I thank thee with all my heart," continued the new comer. "The Lord hath surely brought thee hither." Then, turning to the workmen, the speaker said: "Good, Christian brethren, I pray you, harm not this noble gentleman. He is mine own particular friend, and albeit not one of us, I will answer for his honour with my life."

The Cavalier turned, and grasped his friend's hand. There was no fear in his eyes, only a look of relief, at his escape from so undignified a squabble. Then both the friends smiled, as if the mere sight of each other were a happiness. The workmen slunk back to their task, and without further notice of them the new comer took his companion by the arm, and led him into a small recess formed by the solid masonry of the bridge, where they could carry on their conversation undisturbed.

Puritan and Cavalier! It was a strange sight, in those fanatical days, to see two men, whose very dress proclaimed them of opposite creeds, in familiar discourse. For assuredly the last comer would not have found it so

easy to extricate the Royalist from his precarious position, had not his stiff and sombre attire marked him out as a Puritan. He was younger by several years than his companion, slenderly made, and thin and worn. His close-cropped hair gave no relief to his pale face, and brought his small ears into unnatural prominence; his forehead was high and narrow, the chin large, the lower jaw projecting. Not a handsome man by any means, only redeemed, in fact, from absolute plainness by his large, dark eyes. Sometimes they kindled with sudden fire, sometimes they were soft and pensive; and there was always an earnest, wistful look in them, which attracted people in spite of themselves. Perhaps those eager eyes accounted partly for the glance of loving concern his friend cast at him, as they went across the bridge.

To outward appearance, no two men could be more unlike. The young Puritan's sad coloured coat, his plain hose, and the stiff linen collar and cuffs which had almost become the badge of his sect, did not differ more widely from the Cavalier's graceful flowing dress, than did his spare figure from the other's splendid physique. And, as if to point the contrast between them, the Puritan limped slightly in his walk, a sore defect in warlike times, when a man's life often depended on his strength and soundness of limb.

"Still lame, Roger?" were the Cavalier's first words, as the friends reached the sheltering recess in the masonry, and sat down. "I heard thou hadst gotten a hurt. Hath it not healed?"

"Yea, Ralph, still lame," he answered, "else were I not here, and had not brought thee into this peril. Prithee, friend, forgive me. I knew not that our Puritan folk were so bitter against those of thy party."

"The danger to me was nothing," rejoined the other with a curl of the lip. "I had knocked both the knaves over with a cut of my sword and I had chosen to draw it. But leave that matter. I have come hither at some pains to myself, and since we are met at last, let us not waste our words on trifles. Tell me first news of thee

and thine. How fares thy mother? And thy foot, what is this trouble with it?"

"My mother is well," answered Roger Sparowe, "and would greet thee heartily, knew she of our meeting. Touching this foot of mine, 'tis an obstinate wound I had in Scotland last year, which will not fully heal, and the physicians cannot set it right. It troubleth me somewhat," he went on. "Here am I stayed in idleness, when I would fain be in my place in the Lord General's Army, fighting against the ungodly."

"Whereof I am one," rejoined his friend with a smile. "I owe thy foot no grudge, then, since it keeps thee here, and gives us one enemy the less. Roger, dost know that, save for this foot of thine, we might be arrayed against each other in battle?"

"The will of the Lord be done!" said Roger, lapsing into a slightly drawling Puritanical tone. "A worthy minister in this city told me that the Lord hath oftentimes as much work for them that bide at home, as for those that go forth to the fight. And I strive to believe it, but faith is weak."

Now it was noticeable that the Royalist, who had listened to the workmen's choice biblical language with an ironical smile, winced whenever the same stilted phraseology fell from his friend's lips. But Roger Sparowe spoke in so earnest a tone, that his words carried conviction of his own belief in them, and the Cavalier listened in silence.

"To our business!" he said at last. "Prithee, friend, let it be brief. This very day was I to have taken my journey to the North, and have delayed it only to come hither."

As he spoke, he opened his cloak, and Roger saw that his friend was accoutred in the buff coat and small steel throatlet, which was all the armour the Cavaliers deigned to wear, when opposed to such despised enemies as the Puritans.

"This is my business," said Roger, laying his hand on his friend's arm, "To pray thee, Ralph, as thou valuest thine own soul, not to join that impious army."

Evil will come of it, of that I am fully persuaded. The Man of Sin shall not be suffered to work his will. He 'shall be taken out of the way, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of His mouth.' 'Twas at that text I opened my Bible in the evening exercise yesterday, and straightway, when I lighted upon it, I was constrained to send for thee, and pray thee not to go."

"Forbear!" cried the Cavalier, hotly. "Another word will cost thee our friendship. Roger, I had not thought it of thee, that thou couldest desire me to do this foul dishonour to myself and our cause.

"'Tis no dishonour to do that which shall save thy soul alive. I tell thee, Ralph Wentworth, thou art fighting, not against man, but against the Lord."

"Then let Him see to it," answered Wentworth, fiercely. "Of what worth is my poor soul beside our noble cause? I give my body willingly in the king's service; my soul may fare as it will."

"Blaspheme not, friend," said Roger, solemnly. "Thy soul which I seek to save is more precious even than our friendship. Friendship is much, but what shall a man give, saith Holy Writ, in exchange for his soul?"

"Ay, your souls, your souls!" retorted Wentworth, bitterly. Ye think of naught but your own souls, ye Puritans. Ye have no thought to bestow upon honour, which is more than life itself. Look thee, Roger. Wilt thou not understand that a man may forget himself, body and soul, for the sake of another? Can ye not endure it, ye Puritans, if a man is loyal to his king?"

The hot blood rushed into Wentworth's face, and his dark eyes sparkled. Not one of Cromwell's Ironsides could have looked sterner or more resolute.

"Thou dost misapprehend," said Roger. "This king of thine, by whom thou settest such store, is no king, but a puppet in the hands of the Scots. 'Tis no man's duty to serve him."

"He is my king," returned Wentworth firmly. "Roger, thou wouldest make of me a craven coward, dishonoured and disgraced."

"To fight in an evil cause is not honour."

"Ours is no evil cause," rejoined Wentworth, "We fight for God, and king, and country, and none can take up arms more worthily. If thou speak of duty, know that the king hath a divine right to our allegiance, which no man, an he be not a rank rebel, can refuse him."

"It lies not in the power of one man to rule over another's conscience," answered Roger. "God is our King. We owe no allegiance to Cæsar. Shall we, who have felt the misery of one earthly king, choose us another?"

"How choose him?" replied Wentworth, frowning. "How meanest thou that? Doth a man choose his father or mother? Neither can he choose under what king he will serve. The right to rule cometh of God, and not of man."

"Alas, Ralph, I perceive that thou art yet in outer darkness," cried Roger. "Thine heart is enslaved by the prince of this world. The Lord grant thee light! As for this mock king of thine, Charles Stuart, the boy who hath been playing at kingship awhile in the North, how hath he any claim on thee?"

"Roger, try me not too far," exclaimed Wentworth, fiercely. "Even from thee I cannot brook this. What! would'st have me forsake the king because he is poor and in trouble? He doth but need me, and every man who can help him, the more."

"I would have thee think of thyself and of thy certain ruin. Thou art blind, Ralph, and dost not see that the king of Scots must fail. He hath but 10,000 men with him, half-hearted knaves, who follow him because their leaders drive them. And all England is against him. Hast ever heard yet that the Lord General and his Ironsides were beaten! Come back, Ralph, and abide with me, and I pledge my own life that not a hair of thine head shall be hurt."

"No more of this!" cried Wentworth, half beside himself with indignation. "Is this the language which befits a Sparowe and a gentleman? I tell thee the very

stones would cry out against me, were I guilty of such base treachery. Ye are all the same, ye Puritans. Selfish are ye, every one of you."

"Selfish!" cried Roger, with sparkling eyes. "Selfish, sayest thou, when I have risked our ancient friendship to plead with thee?"

The two friends stopped, and looked at each other. "Is it so, Roger?" said Wentworth, more gently, after a pause. "Nay, then, let us bethink ourselves, ere we suffer bitter words to part us."

Roger's eyes grew moist. "I could almost give thee up, Ralph, even thee," he said, in a low voice, "did my conscience bid us."

"It shall not be," answered Wentworth. "We will hold to each other, let happen what will to king or general. The war of creeds shall not part us; we are too closely bound."

"Would God it had been closer," said Roger, with a sigh. "Had Mary lived, she had made thee one of us, Ralph. She perchance, had kept thee from rushing on thine own ruin."

Wentworth pushed away Roger Sparowe's hand. "It is not well to speak of these things," he said, hastily. "Thou doest not wisely, Roger, to stir sleeping sorrows. Enough that the past is past. '*Je me contente.*'" *

"The Lord's will be done!" returned Roger. "But, oh! 'tis hard to see thee going to destruction, Ralph. Will nought move thee?"

"Nought, my friend," was Wentworth's quiet answer. "That which is my duty I must do—and thou too. Roger, are we friends? Never, methinks, in two hundred years, hath the friendship between Sparowe and Wentworth been strained so nearly to the breaking point as to-day. Hath it stood the test?"

"'Twas no test with me, Ralph. Thou art the same

* At the battle of Hexham John Sparowe and his friend Wentworth fought side by side. As they both lay a-dying, a double motto was bestowed upon them, to commemorate their value and friendship. The motto given to John Sparowe, which has been borne by the family from that time, was "*Nescia sola mori:*" "Unable to die alone." To which the dying Wentworth is said to have answered: "*Je me contente.*"

to me as ever. I sought but to save thee, and since the Lord willeth not thy salvation through me, unto Him I commit thee."

The two men wrung each other's hands, and for a moment there was silence so profound, that they could hear the water lapping softly against the buttresses below. Then speaking with assumed carelessness, Wentworth asked:

"And how fares my friend, Walter? Doth he remain with thee, or comes he to the war, to win his knightly spurs?"

"Walter abides at home," answered Roger gravely. "While I am master in our house, he must submit himself to me. And since he will not fight on the Lord's side, I will not suffer him to join the battle. He is young and weak, and hath readily yielded to my desires."

Wentworth shot a keen sharp look at his friend, and a smile, instantly repressed, curled his lips, but he made no comment. "Farewell, Roger," he said after another pause. "For thy sake I desire it may be as thou wouldest have it—for mine own scarcely. I dare not tarry longer. There are others who wait for me. When shall we meet again, my friend?"

"I know not," answered Roger sadly. "None can say what may betide on the morrow. These be troublous times, Ralph. But our bond of friendship standeth sure?"

Wentworth nodded, and Roger went on: "Forget not if thou art in want or trouble, that thou hast a friend. I hold it sinful to swear, but I give thee mine hand here before the Lord, that I will not fail thee in any stress. If the battle go against you—as it must do, ye have not a third of our men—all I have is thine. Make thy way to me, and I will hide thee."

"A man may lose his head for saying as much," said Wentworth significantly. "I thank thee, Roger. There spoke thy noblest self. But be at ease; I shall not put thee to the proof. We shall not lose. The goodness of our cause will give each man the strength of ten. Nay, forsooth," he continued with a sad smile;

"It may the rather be that thou wilt need protection of me, and thou shalt have it, fear not."

Then the two men laid their hands on each others shoulders, and kissed each other solemnly, after the more demonstrative fashion of those times.

"Farewell, Ralph," said Roger, mournfully. "Alas, that it should be farewell! that we fight not side by side! Surely 'tis a judgment of the Lord upon me that all I love—mother, brother, friend—should be against me."

"Nay, not all of us," said Wentworth, with a smile. "Be not so sad-hearted. Methinks I have heard talk of a fair Puritan damsel, who seest these things as thou dost, down there in Suffolk. Come, man, pluck up thy spirit. How stands it with thee? Hath report spoken true?"

"These be no times to think of love," returned Roger, but his averted face was crimson. "'Tis war and bitter strife with which we are concerned, not the courting of fair ladies. Once more, farewell! and the Lord grant thee to see the error of thy way."

And, great as was Wentworth's need to be gone, Roger left him so abruptly, that the Puritan's slight figure had already vanished into the dark tunnel between the houses, before the Royalist turned, and made for the bridge end, where his horse awaited him.

CHAPTER II.

AT THE SIGN OF THE BULL, COLCHESTER.

Emerging from the northern end of London Bridge, Roger stood a moment in a gap between the houses, to recover his composure. He was more disturbed by Wentworth's last words than he cared to let anyone see. His breath came and went, and he put his hand over his eyes for a moment, as if to shut out some remembrance. Had he not been so moved, he would scarcely have stopped in a place few Londoners could pass without a shudder. For just above him, on the gate which formed the northern boundary of the bridge, stood a row of pikes which, from time immemorial, had been adorned with the heads of traitors. Fortunately this spectacle, with other relics of barbarism, had fallen into disuse, and no such ghastly sight disgraced the Puritan government.

From this point Roger could see the wide and beautiful curve of the river as far as Westminster. The Abbey church, still spireless, though it had been begun six centuries ago, stood out from amid a group of houses. Nearer rose the stately pile of Whitehall, the scene of a certain tragedy, more than two years ago, on which few Englishmen, whether Puritans or Cavaliers, cared to reflect. The houses which reached from Westminster to the foot of the bridge were as varied in the purposes to which they were put, as in their outward appearance. By the side of a palace stood a brew-house, the manufacture of beer, before the introduction of tea, being an important article of commerce. Beyond this was a cluster of small houses, built almost into the water, their upper stories raised on piles; while further down the river rose the Tower, still the chief fortress of the capital.

People in those days, however, did not concern themselves much with the picturesque. Life was too full to leave much scope to the imagination. Roger would have thought it a sin to stand gazing at a scene which, to his country-bred eyes, was at least impressive. Turning to the right, he plunged into a long narrow street running by the side of the river, at some distance from it. Here the tall houses, with their quaint pointed gables and high sloping roofs, almost touched each other. Only a slender strip of air and light was between them, and this was nearly choked by the long poles thrust out from the upper windows, on which the linen of the household was hanging to dry.

A few steps further brought the traveller to the inn where he had taken up his quarters two days ago. It was a handsome, roomy building, with gables and rich fantastic carvings, and fine "pargetting" work. Inns in those days of posting and riding across country were not the puny establishments to which they have dwindled. The inn where Roger lodged was built round a court-yard. The upper stories on two sides projected, and, in the wide roofed space between them, huge travelling coaches were stowed away in safety, horses stabled and groomed, and room found for the army of serving men who accompanied travellers of rank on their journeys.

In former days the court-yards of these large inns, with their many recesses and commodious galleries above, had often been used for dramatic representations. Many were the plays which, in the merry times of good Queen Bess, had been witnessed, again and again, from these very upper windows;—things whereon a good Puritan could not reflect without a shudder.

The business which had brought Roger Sparowe to London was of no pleasant nature. One of the first duties which fell to the Long Parliament when, some years before, they took the administration of the country into their hands, was to provide for the better government of the church. All the bishops, and most of the clergy, had followed the king. The common

people were disgusted with the elaborate ritual forced upon them by Archbishop Laud, and clamoured for reform, and the reaction against Prelacy was quickened by the massacre of the Protestants in Ireland. For nearly twenty years the Puritans were supreme in Church and State.

The first use they made of their newly acquired power was to eject all the ministers of the Church who would not swear fealty to the Parliament, a sweeping measure which touched four-fifths of the clergy. It was necessary to supply their places without delay. The sheep could not be left without a shepherd: and an Assembly of Divines was convened by the Parliament at Westminster to aid them in the bestowal of the livings. But though these men laboured zealously to recommend none but persons fit for the duty, it could not but happen that the shepherds were often hastily chosen and unworthy. The demand for "preaching ministers" far exceeded the supply, and the most unsuitable pastors were often thrust into important cures. To such an one, at least in the opinion of Roger Sparowe, and some of his townfolk, had been confided the care of souls in the good town of Ipswich. It was to procure his removal that Roger, after due complaint lodged, had, at the summons of the Westminster Assembly, undertaken the toilsome journey to London.

It made his expedition none the less tedious to know that the other members of his family, his mother and brother, were bitterly averse to it. If Master Obadiah Sturges had not succeeded in winning the favour of the rest of his parishioners, he had at least found his way to the heart of Mistress Margaret Sparowe. Mistress Sparowe was a staunch Royalist, bigoted for Church and King. Yet—no one knew why—she was devoted to the preacher who, by mandate of the Parliament, had been thrust into the rich Ipswich living. It was a singular thing, people said, and served to increase the suspicion with which he was regarded.

There were altogether some strange anomalies in the Sparowe family. Here was Mistress Margaret, a well-

known Royalist, sincerely, almost fanatically, attached to Prelacy, who yet appeared to delight in the ministrations of that ultra-Calvinist, and faithful servant of God, Master Obadiah Sturges. And, as if that were not enough, Roger's younger brother, Walter Sparowe, had, during the past year, shown an equal attachment to the minister. There was something almost ludicrous in the deferential way in which the dashing young Cavalier treated the stiff, sanctimonious Puritan, who was so rigid in conduct and doctrine, that the good folks of Ipswich were fain to beg for a less strait-laced minister. It was even whispered that Walter Sparowe had, on one occasion, sat without flinching through the six hours service ordained by Parliament at the fast on the last Wednesday in every month; an infliction under which even the most rigid Puritans occasionally grew restive. "A sign of grace!" said some of his neighbours! "A hypocritical pretence!" answered others, who knew better the stuff of which the wild young fellow was made. Strangest of all, the head of the Sparowe house, that godly youth, Master Roger, who had followed in the steps of his Puritan father from childhood, seemed to view this singular friendship between his scape-grace brother and Master Obadiah with much uneasiness. To the surprise of the townsfolk, he placed himself at the head of the movement for the removal of the unpopular minister.

As he rode into the Dean's yard at Westminster, where the assembled divines were holding their sittings, Roger felt himself in evil case. Life never went easily with him, and at this moment the burden seemed heavier than usual. His sad parting with Wentworth dwelt in his mind. The task on which he was engaged, though of vital importance, was exceedingly distasteful to him. It was his aim to have a "conscience void of offence towards all men," yet his present object was to oust a man with whom he had no personal quarrel, from his living. And, further, he was distressed by the sight of the soldiers who passed him. These were men inured to battle, Ironsides and warlike train bands,

going forth under a tried and well beloved leader to almost certain victory. He, too, had it not been for his luckless wound, would have been with them.

Ill fortune had attended Roger in all his military enterprises. He had hurried up in hot haste to Scotland last year, only to arrive too late for the battle of Dunbar, to get his foot crushed in an obscure skirmish, and to be laid aside all the winter. Mistress Margaret had tried her hand at healing the broken bone, and all the leeches in the country side, but to no purpose. Roger did not console himself with the thought that now he should not cross swords with Wentworth. He only chafed that the dream of his life would remain unfulfilled, and he would never win a word of recognition from the great Puritan general.

Arrived at Westminster, he flung himself off his horse, and asked to be conducted to the Assembly. He was brought into an upper room, where a committee of the Divines was sitting. But here he fared no better than he might have expected. These learned men were already somewhat nettled that their choice of a minister had been called in question, and when they found that the charge was preferred by a beardless stripling, who could apparently assign no reason for so heavy an accusation, they were as angry as such grave and reverend men ever permitted themselves to be.

"Methinks your townfolk had shown greater honour to this Assembly, by sending a burgess of maturer age to represent them," were the first words of the prolocutor, or, as he would now be called, the chairman of the committee.

"So please you, all our able-bodied men have gone forth to the war," answered Roger. "Our city is left like to a lodge in the wilderness, and I alone remain, by reason of a certain hurt in my foot, whereby I am hindered from fighting. When the question arose, who should come hither to present this petition, I offered myself, and there being none other, the town elected me."

"Better, my son, to have remained at home, than to have undertaken so long and toilsome a journey," said

one of the ministers. "Yours will prove a bootless errand, I fear."

"You have here brought a heavy accusation against a man whom we esteem as a godly minister of Christ," continued another, leaning forward to look at the petitioner. "Such a charge we cannot lightly entertain. Master Obadiah Sturges was inducted into his cure by my lord of Manchester himself, after full examination had of his credentials, and"—

"After full examination? Was that verily so? Had your reverences good cause for this high opinion ye entertain of him?"

"Assuredly we had good cause," returned the minister, with the look of anger at the unseemly interruption. "We appoint no man lightly to the weighty care of souls. Young man, you have yet to learn to listen in silence to the elders of the Church."

"Reverend sir, I crave your pardon," answered Roger, penitently. "I meant not any discourtesy. Only I would fain know—the matter toucheth me so nearly—wherefore the man hath been preferred to our living."

"And wherefore should the matter touch you so nearly?" demanded the prolocutor. "Wherefore should you inquire so earnestly into our reasons? Is it to gratify some private revenge that you desire the removal of Master Obadiah?"

"Nay, sir," cried Roger, earnestly, "revenge hath no part in me. There is no hatred betwixt us; rather is he more fair spoken toward me than need is. But I would fain see our Church flourish in all godly honesty and good report, and it can scarce be so with Master Obadiah."

"And your reason for this evil thought of him?"

Roger turned crimson, and looked on the ground. "He is not well spoken of in the town," he said. "Some will have it that he hath sinned against morality."

"And have you no better ground for your charge than hearsay? Let his accusers stand forth, and prove what they say. Doth this which you affirm come within your own knowledge?"

"Nay, I know naught myself of the matter," said Roger, and again he hung his head abashed. "I speak but that which is town talk. And"—he hesitated—"and some there be that say he is Popishly inclined."

"Ay, how mean you that?" was the reply. "The petition here says that Master Obadiah is of unsavoury report among the godly by reason of his too great strictness—a strange objection, forsooth, to lodge against a man. But it is manifest that a man cannot be over strict, and likewise Popishly inclined."

"It seemeth to me," said a third, who had not yet spoken, "that the charges rest chiefly on town gossip—a sorry guide in so weighty a matter. Have you verily undertaken this journey with no better proofs to your hand?"

Roger stood silent for a moment, and the colour went and came in his face. "I have no proofs," he answered at last, "none, I would say, which I can advance. I would only beseech you, reverend sirs, to make such inquiry touching this man as shall bring the truth to light, whether he be, to wit, a child of the Lord."

"And think you," replied the prolocutor, significantly, "that we, who have the care of all the churches upon us, have leisure to enquire concerning the character of a man, when ye, who live at his door, can discover nothing of a surety against him? Have a care, Master Sparowe. They who bring railing accusations against others may peradventure find themselves accused. You have a mother and brother who, if report say true, are yet in the bond of iniquity."

"None grieve over their error more am I, reverend sir," replied Roger, sadly.

"The wise man doth not grieve, but act," answered the prolocutor, and there was a murmur of assent all round the table. "You harbour those who would fain restore the accursed thing in Church and State, against which the Lord in these latter days hath so abundantly testified. Perchance you hold with them yourself."

"Nay, Sir, nay! I cannot drive them from me, but I think not as they do. And forget not, I pray you," he

looked wistfully round at the stern, forbidding faces, "that my father sealed his faith at Naseby."

"Ay, was that so? In sooth I had forgotten it," replied his questioner. "It is well, then, my son. For your father's sake we will not doubt your own conformity. See only that you bring no further charge against this holy man. Even the child of the Lord may err, and in this matter you are clearly in fault."

With this unsatisfactory answer Roger was fain to be content. He had failed in his business, as he knew he should fail. With a sigh he resigned himself to the prospect of seeing a man, to whom he felt the strongest aversion, discharging duties for which he knew him to be utterly unfit. All these things were against him. He was but an unprofitable servant, he said to himself, as he rode slowly back to his hostelry. His nearest and dearest were all arrayed in opposition to him, all ranked on the side of failure, of sin, of the devil. Perhaps he was verily, as he sometimes thought himself, forsaken of God.

Roger Sparowe was a Puritan in all points but one. Strive as he would, he could not attain to the self-confidence, the unquestioning belief in the purity of his own motives, which was characteristic of the sect to which he belonged. He was never free from doubts and fears, and when he saw others satisfied with themselves, and with their actions, he felt that the fault lay with him, and that he still dwelt in outer darkness.

Something, too, in Wentworth's face, when Walter Sparowe was spoken of, made Roger vaguely anxious on his brother's account. There was nothing now to detain him in London, a lonely place enough to a young country squire who seldom stirred from home. Accordingly, on the following morning he was up betimes, settled his modest account at the inn, and started on his homeward journey.

Two hundred years ago the tide of fashion in London had already begun to set westward. Temple Bar was the great landmark between the city and the suburbs, From thence the houses stretched along the Strand,

growing fewer, and the gardens larger, as they approached Westminster. In this quarter lived those of the upper classes whom duty or pleasure compelled to be in London. Not but what there were many splendid mansions, surrounded by noble gardens, to be found within the City. Still, that was emphatically the place where business was transacted, and the merchants' houses and shops clustered thickly round St. Paul's and the Royal Exchange.

As Roger Sparowe took his way through the wards of the City, out at the Bishop's Gate, and along the street which still bears that name, he passed through the poorest parts of the town. The country soon began. The houses extended as far as Mile End and Stepney, then both pretty rustic villages, and beyond these the young traveller saw before him a vast extent of forest land, stretching away to the rising ground of Epping Forest. To the left of the road lay the great woodland of Enfield Chase, a favourite hunting ground of the Tudor sovereigns. Here Queen Elizabeth had rested the night previous to her triumphal entry into the Capital, which she had quitted a few years before as a prisoner; and here she had often kept royal state at her crown demesne of Elsyng Hall. So excellent, indeed, was the hunting, and so enamoured had her successor, King James, become of it, that he had compelled his favourite, Robert Cecil, in somewhat arbitrary fashion, to exchange his fine hunting lodge at Theobalds, on the borders of the chase, for another at Hatfield.

Crossing the river Lea, Roger struck over a spur of the hilly ground, which was covered for miles by the dense growth of Epping Forest, and proceeded in the direction of Brentwood. At the pretty little village of Epping, he stopped for a few moments to refresh his horse. Epping was a fair type of the hamlets which were dotted all over England. In the centre rose a church of noble Gothic architecture, built in the days when men undertook such work for the salvation of their souls, and made it the occupation of a lifetime. The houses clustered thickly round it. Set in the heart of a

great woodland, most of them were built of timber, and thatched, a foot thick, with straw; but all of them had high pointed gables, and some of the steep roofs were tiled with red brick, which gave them a rich, warm appearance. Many of the larger houses had huge chimneys, square or six-sided, solidly built of red brick. These picturesque chimneys served a double purpose. Not only did they provide an outlet for the smoke, but if all tales were true, many of them contained small chambers and hiding places, built into the thickness of the masonry. There was scarcely a house in England which could not boast of some such internal peculiarity of structure, where a man in distress—Cavalier, Nonconformist minister, or Popish priest—could be concealed. The disturbed state of the times rendered such arrangements almost necessary.

Another striking evidence of the crisis of civil war through which the country had passed was seen in the small proportion of land under cultivation. The rough, broken ground, half grass, half heath and barren sand, stretched to the very walls of the houses, without any intermediate fringe of garden or field. The time when men, as they sowed their fields, doubted who should reap them, was passed. The swarms of Royalist troopers had been exterminated by the strong arm of the Lord General. But the great Civil War was still felt in every part of the country. So many able-bodied men had been drawn off, some of them never to return, that much land had fallen out of cultivation, and at that time perhaps not more than half the country, at most, was tilled. The new call to arms had come at the most inconvenient season of the agricultural year; and Roger Sparowe, as he passed along, wondered from whence the men would come to gather the harvest he saw ripening under the golden August sun.

At Chelmsford he stopped to dine and rest his horse, then pushed on through the long summer afternoon to Colchester, 50 miles from London, where he intended to spend the night. Young, active, and inured to long distances on horseback, he might perhaps have

accomplished the whole journey to Ipswich in one long day, had the roads been good. But roads in England had degenerated sadly from the days of the splendid old Roman causeways. Under the genial influence of the summer sun, the road along which Roger Sparowe picked his way was as nearly passable as it ever was. It would be a misnomer, however, to say that the roads were made, in any modern sense of the word. For the most part they were left as they were. Sometimes they degenerated into a mere sheep-track, sometimes they widened into a quagmire, and always, in the best weather, they were two or three feet deep in mud. At certain periods of the year the waters were out, and the country was flooded for miles. Much of the land was still marshy ground, especially in the low-lying districts of Essex and Cambridge, and inundations were frequent and disastrous.

In addition to these difficulties, the roads, especially those in the neighbourhood of the capital, were infested with highwaymen, who, to a much later date, robbed and murdered with impunity. Thus a journey to London and back was not accomplished without manifold dangers and hair-breadth escapes.

The easiest method of travelling was that usually adopted, namely, on horseback; and if a lady were of the party, she rode pillion behind one of the men on a large horse, called a double horse. One or two such parties did Roger fall in with on his way. Now and then he met a huge travelling coach, containing eight or ten people, and painfully dragged along by six horses, as a matter of necessity, not of luxury. These coaches usually stuck fast in the mire every few miles; and, in spite of his lame foot, Roger was often obliged to dismount, and to assist in bringing them through a marsh, a bit of broken ground, or the bed of a small river.

The state of the roads being such, care for his horse made him draw rein soon after he had crossed the river Colne, from which the town of Colchester took its name. Colchester still bore traces of the severe siege it had sustained three years before, but it was beginning

to recover its usual aspect. Here was an inn, where Roger had occasionally rested on his journeys to and fro, and where he intended to lodge for the night.

Like every other hostelry he had passed, the place was swarming with stern-faced, buff-coated Puritan soldiers, on their way to join the army in the North. Some, after the manner of soldiers, were drinking, moderately, for all excesses were strictly forbidden. But the greater number sat at the rough inn table, Bible in hand, and talked of predestination, election, perseverance in grace, eternal reprobation, and other kindred topics of absorbing interest. From time to time, some man with a gift of utterance took the word out of the mouth of his less eloquent brethren, and discoursed learnedly on the matter under discussion, while the rest listened in solemn silence.

Roger did not join the company, as they evidently expected him to do. Puritan though he was, he could not forget that he was also a gentleman, with a shield of many quarterings, and counted back his ancestry for at least 250 years. He ordered his supper, therefore, in a small inner room, and thither, as soon as his host had signified that it was ready, he betook himself.

He was served by a comely damsel, dressed after the usual fashion of waiting maids in those days, but displaying somewhat more of a full white throat and neck, and a well rounded arm than was necessary.

As she brought in a huge jug of home-brewed ale, and set it down before the traveller, she looked closely at him. Her gaze was rather curious than impertinent, but Roger glanced up sharply, feeling that he was being narrowly examined. He saw before him a handsome girl, with bright dark eyes, and a brilliant white and pink skin; but there was something in those eyes which made the young Puritan, the moment he met them, blush and turn away.

He could not tell why this untoward impression had been made upon him. The girl seemed neither forward nor unmaidenly, as she moved about the room, attending to his wants with less than usual of the uncouth

brusqueness to which his experience of inns had accustomed him. On one pretext or another, however, she lingered, till at last he told her sharply that he no longer required her attendance.

Once alone, Roger took himself to task for this unwonted irritation. Why had the woman's presence such strange power to annoy him? He was certain he had never seen her before, and, far from admiring her, he found her openly displayed charms almost repulsive. Doubtless it was a wile of the devil, who had been permitted thus to annoy him, because in the pride of his heart, he had withdrawn himself from the company of godly soldiers in the other room.

To turn his thoughts he walked to the window, and looked down into the courtyard below. On the opposite side was a huge kitchen, a mere barn, with a mud floor, roughly roofed in, and furnished only with a great brick chimney above the enormous open hearth. The side next the courtyard was not walled in, but stood open to all comers, and Roger could plainly see everything that went on in the room, if such it could be called. It seemed to be full of people. Rough country folk, drivers, carriers, ostlers, were incessantly passing in and out. A few soldiers lounged idly against the rude wooden pillars, blackened with smoke, which supported the open side of the kitchen: while two or three women moved to and fro across the great hearth, with its huge cauldrons and pipkins, superintending the primitive cooking arrangements of the inn.

On one side of the fire stood a high wooden box. Roger wondered what purpose it could serve in such a place. Presently, however, through the coarse talk of the men, and the sharp voices of the women, he heard a babe crying, and suddenly discovered that this curious object was a cradle. Amid all the din and noise, a little child had been sleeping!

The cry continued. Apparently it was no one's business to stop it; when, just as Roger felt a foolish impulse to go himself—for he dearly loved children—he saw the serving maid whose appearance had so strangely

impressed him. She crossed the kitchen hurriedly, struck a blow at a man who was staring too curiously into the cradle, took up the child, and, without the smallest reticence, proceeded to satisfy it.

Roger turned away with a sense of relief. After all, this girl was no common serving wench, but some respectable married woman, called in, probably, to help in an emergency. Or possibly mine host's own daughter, on a visit to her father, who had consented to wait on the guests during the pressure of work caused by the sudden influx of soldiers.

The next morning Roger was up with the sun, and ready to start, hoping to reach Ipswich before noon. Early as he was, however, the girl had forestalled him, and this time she seemed determined to have speech of him. As she set down his breakfast, consisting of a huge venison pasty, and home-brewed ale—breakfasts in those days were as substantial as a modern dinner—she again looked at him, and said, with the same curious expression:—

“I know your honour's face well.”

Roger started. “Thou knowest me?” he asked, trying to speak in an unconcerned voice. “Where hast thou seen me? I come not often hither, and I cannot call to mind that thou hast served me before.”

“Nevertheless, I know you, Master Sparowe,” she answered, more boldly; “and your worship's brother, Master Walter, I have waited on many a time. That was in the old days; now, forsooth, I serve him no longer,” she added, with a toss of her head.

“Hath my brother been here?” asked Roger, vaguely alarmed at the tone in which she spoke. “He is oft from home, and it may be he hath journeyed as far as this. Thou knowest us both, then, even to our names?”

“Know you!” echoed the girl, with a bitter laugh. “Ay, to your names and your faces, and all else concerning you. I am not like to forget a name which should have been mine own.”

“Thine! thou a Sparowe!” repeated Roger, with a puzzled expression. “How could that be?”

The woman dropped her eyes before his frank look of inquiry. "You may know how it could be," she answered, with less confidence. "I speak only of that which was due to me."

"But thou art not of our lineage," said Roger. "How couldst thou bear the name?"

"If all had their rights," she muttered, "I were as good as any of you. But foul dishonour hath been done me—the name hath been wrongfully withheld"—

Roger sprang to his feet, his face blazing with pride and anger. "Woman!" he exclaimed, fiercely, "have a care what words you say. Your pardon!" for he had clapt his hand on his sword; "but I would have you know that the name of our honourable house is not to be lightly spoken."

"An honourable house, forsooth," answered the woman, bitterly, "and honourable are his deeds. Is it an honourable thing, think you, to lure a girl from her home with promise of marriage? Only a poor serving maid! A high favour to her if a young gallant do but look at her. But serving maids have hearts, mark you, as well as other folk."

"Who? who hath done this?" cried Roger. "Name him, that I may confront him with his evil deeds. This sword shall be as the sword of the Lord to avenge thee, if thy words are true."

The girl shrank back; she seemed almost afraid for a moment of the spirit she had aroused. "Who should it be but your honour's own brother?" she said, more quietly. "Knew you verily naught thereof? But hold, good sir, I need no avenging, no drawing of swords. I spoke but to show you how matters should stand between us, if right were done me."

"My brother!" repeated Roger, his face crimson with horror. "'Tis impossible! Woman, thou art beside thyself; trouble hath driven thee mad. Walter is yet a child, who knoweth not his right hand from his left. If thou must needs accuse, spare one at least who is too young to be guilty."

"Your brother it is, and none other," she replied,

stubbornly. "Ay, glare at me as you will, you cannot move me from my words. I know you well, Master Sparowe, and that dainty madam, your mother. Perchance, an it were not for fear of hurting her, Walter had made a lady of me."

"Forbear!" cried Roger, livid with passion. "Take not my mother's name within thy polluted lips."

"Polluted, quotha!" she answered, bitterly, "and who hath polluted them? Now mark me well, Master Roger Sparowe. For all your smooth ways, and canting Puritanical tongue, you are proud as Walter himself. Proud are ye all, ye Sparowes. It hath made me mad to think how near, but for your pride, I might have been to you. But pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall."

She was at the door before Roger, stupefied with horror and astonishment, could utter a word. There she paused a moment, glanced irresolutely at him, and coming swiftly back, whispered: "But no violence, I charge you, no violence! Harm him not. He is your brother, and but a lad. The wrong is done and naught will mend it."

"I will sift the mystery," said Roger. "Before the sun sets this day, I will know whether thy words are true. And, if it be so, God do so to me, and more also, if I see not justice done."

CHAPTER III.

MOTE END.

ABOUT six miles out of the ancient town of Ipswich, near the great high road that ran to London, stood a country house. It was built only on two stories, and in so queer and rambling a fashion, that it seemed to cover even more ground than it really did, though the buildings occupied nearly half an acre. Here, too, was the bareness which characterized the whole country. Right up to the outer walls of the mansion stretched the bleak, open ground, dotted over here and there with trees, but with never a road, and scarcely even so much as a hedge to break the monotony. A long reach of dead wall about ten feet high enclosed the house, stabling, outbuildings, and gardens, and all on the outer side was rough grass land.

The house was built, like many others, in the form of a quadrangle, with two projecting wings. The main entrance was defended by a strong iron grating, like a portcullis, behind which was a stout wooden door, bound and clamped with iron, set in the thickness of the wall. From the main block the stables ran out in a long straggling line in the rear, and were approached by a huge gateway, built into the outer wall, and closed by oaken doors half-a-foot thick. One wing faced the entrance, running at a short distance from the wall. On this side the windows were few and small, looking almost like loopholes. Such grace and beauty as the solid castellated mansion possessed lay all in the other wing, which was on the side of the house furthest from the stables and entrance. Here were the rooms of the ladies of the house, and here, surrounded by high walls, was a fair flower garden. It was laid out stiffly, in the style of the time, but abounded in old-fashioned, sweet-scented flowers.

Seen from the outside, this house of grim and forbidding aspect looked as if it were prepared to abide a siege of several months' duration. For that very reason, perhaps, its defensive capabilities had never been put to the test throughout the war. In the bottom of their hearts, this was a sore chagrin to the large retinue of grooms and serving men, without whom no household of a man of wealth was complete. They had all been drilled and trained to arms with the most rigid precision. Each man knew the post he was to take up in case the house was attacked; and now the war had dwindled into a mere duel, certain to be soon ended, between the Lord General and young Charles Stuart, and they had never been called on so much as to convoy a waggon load of provisions.

All these martial preparations, sufficient to have defended a town, were intended to serve for the protection of an old man and his two daughters. Master Nehemiah Burroughs, the owner of this well-garrisoned house, was one of the leading burgesses of the neighbouring town. He had been in turn chamberlain, portman (an office which he held for life), and bailiff, and had only declined the honour of representing Ipswich in the present Parliament, because he found it impossible to delegate his important duties at home to any substitute. It was in a happy hour that he refused. The Parliament of 1640, known as the Long Parliament, had now been sitting without intermission for 11 years, and had he been a member of it, he would have had small joy of his home and of his children.

Still he was forced to be often absent. Puritanism had taken a stronger hold of the Eastern Counties than of any other part of England. Every man of pious mind was required to put his hand to the plough, and to keep the two-headed hydra, in the shape of Popery and Prelacy, at bay. Those who stayed at home were to the full as serviceable to the good cause as those who took sword and pike, and proved their valour at Marston Moor and Naseby. The men in these Eastern Counties were mostly of stern Puritanical stuff, "godly" men

according to the phraseology of the time. It was from them that Cromwell drew the bulk of those redoubtable Ironsides who truly, as he said, were "never beaten at all."

Early in the struggle the seven Eastern Counties had formed themselves into an association for purposes of defence. It was probably owing to the firm front presented by this association, that the tide of war had never touched the East of England at all, but had been mainly confined to the West and centre. Master Burroughs had been appointed member of the committee for the county of Suffolk. The office caused him almost as many journeys, and goings to and fro, as if he had taken part in the furious war with mouth and pen, the disputings, discussions, orderings and counter-orderings, which had been carried on for years at Westminster. What with drilling the soldiers, extracting their pay—always with much difficulty—from the Parliament or the local authorities, and crushing all symptoms of disaffection, Master Burroughs had a busy time of it.

During these absences his place was ably filled by his daughter, Mistress Kezia. The rigid Puritan household flourished under her care. She conducted with much unction the morning and evening exercise; marshalled the household to the periodical fast, the last Wednesday in the month, strictly enjoined by Parliament, and now of ten years' standing; repressed the least attempt at a jest or light word in the youngest stable boy; and maintained the whole family on the principle of severe abstinence from everything that was pleasant or agreeable. Master Nehemiah himself, albeit there was no more orthodox Puritan in all the country side, found it needful at times to temper her zeal. Kezia was especially an adept in the art of wielding texts from the Bible, which seemed, under her skilful manipulation, literally to become a two-edged sword; while her younger sister Alice was like to weep sometimes for sheer heart hunger, so little spiritual sustenance did she find in the stern theology of father and sister.

Yet Alice, too, was religious to the heart's core. Heaven and hell were very real, and almost equally appalling, to her. There were times when she looked at the world about her, and wondered why it was so fair, since, as she was taught to believe, it was the City of Destruction, from which every Christian was bound to flee. She wearied of the continual talk of election and final perseverance, and the condemnation of the whole world, except the Presbyterians, to eternal perdition. It almost seemed as if there were something wanting in this vigorous Puritan belief, so little did it meet her spiritual needs. Of late, since the visits of a grave young gentleman, with wistful dark eyes, Alice had begun to doubt whether the one thing lacking, in her life as in her religion, were not—love.

Roger Sparowe, who had ridden at full speed from Colchester, drew rein at last, as he approached Mote End. Dropping the bridle on the horse's neck, he debated with himself, for the space of full five minutes, whether he should ride across to the entrance, ring at the great bell, and gain admittance to the closely guarded house. He was well acquainted with all the movements of the family. He knew that he would find Master Nehemiah at home, remembering suddenly some talk of a sermon to be preached in the neighbourhood, which would be over by this time.

Further, inhospitable as was the outward aspect of the house, Roger felt he was sure of a welcome, though not perhaps so cordial as usual. Like many of his neighbours, Master Burroughs disapproved of Roger's journey to town, and held that the Reverend Obadiah Sturges had been wrongfully suspected. That he would win no sympathy from him in the failure of his mission did not weigh so much with Roger, as the fear lest Mistress Kezia should act as she had done at his last visit, monopolize the guest, despatch her younger sister elsewhere, and prevent him from having a moment's speech with her.

Then, too, that scene in the inn parlour at Colchester rankled in his mind. Roger did not believe the woman's

words, but he felt that until he could see his brother, and hear the refutation of them from his own lips, a kind of stain rested upon the honour of his house. And there was an atmosphere of such exquisite purity about Alice Burroughs that Roger, in his fantastic integrity, shrank from seeing her, until he could do so with an absolutely clear conscience.

Full of these thoughts, Roger caught up the rein with a jerk, as his tired horse, which was used to the creature comforts of Moat End, made a feint of drawing up to the stable gate. He had not gone far, however, before he was suddenly hailed from behind. Hailed! nay, that was altogether the wrong word. It was no shout, but rather the grave and authoritative utterance of his own name, which reached Roger's ears, and made him turn instantly, with a beating heart, knowing very well who had accosted him.

The owner of Mote End, Master Burroughs himself, was in the act of riding up to the iron gateway. He was a short, stout man, with a sallow skin, thin lips, and a broad nose with an unpleasant looking lump in the middle of it. He was dressed in a long black coat, with deep, pointed collar and cuffs, all of spotless, stiff starched linen, and on his head he wore a small velvet skull cap. He rode an enormous double horse, and behind him, on a pillion, was a lady. For a moment Roger's heart beat quickly, but as she sprang down, and displayed a small neat figure, almost lost in the folds of her heavy riding cloak, he sighed, and leant over his horse's neck, awaiting an invitation to enter.

"The Lord be with you, my son," said Master Burroughs, in a deep, unctuous voice, as soon as he had slowly accomplished the business of dismounting. "Whither away in such haste? Have you never a word for old friends, but must needs pass their very door. Come in, man, come in, and refresh yourself this warm morning with a draught of fresh ale." And stepping to Roger's side, he laid his hand on his arm.

Roger winced at the heavy touch. "I am in haste, honoured sir," he replied, as he dismounted, half

reluctant, half eager to go in. "Needs must be that I reach home at noon; my mother hath not seen me these ten days."

"Noon, say you? why it is but ten of the clock. You have been up betimes, friend, and your horse is weary, an you are not. Whence come you?"

But just as Roger was beginning to broach an unpleasant subject, Mistress Kezia broke in, for once, with a welcome interruption.

"Such a godly discourse as we have sat under this morning!" she said, in a high shrill voice: "the Lord grant us to profit thereby. The text was 2 Cor. vi. 7, and the worshipful Master Hold-fast-the-Truth dwelt much on the need of separating ourselves from the unclean thing. 'Twas a grief to me that you were not there, Master Sparowe. Perchance the Lord had blessed the word to your spiritual benefit, and caused you to cast in your lot more fully with His people."

"I walk according to my light, Mistress Kezia," said Roger, humbly. "The Lord knoweth them that are His. If my heart be right in His sight I am content."

"By their fruits ye shall know them," quoted Kezia. "And St. Paul saith: 'Can two walk together except they be agreed?' The Lord hath often laid it upon my soul to tell you, that your Christian walk and conversation are hindered, and much offence given to the godly, because you suffer them in your house that live not according to the Word."

Had Kezia not been Alice's sister, Roger would have retorted that the Lord laid upon her soul to speak of a great many things with which she had no concern. But her influence over Master Burroughs was so great, that the young man felt the necessity of conciliating her.

They were now walking across the quadrangle in front of the house. Master Burroughs was behind them, listening to his steward's report. Roger, who always strove to be deferential and courteous with father and daughter, to-day could not resist glancing furtively round him, to see if Mistress Alice were nowhere in sight. But not a glimpse of her could he obtain.

Probably she was in her flower garden, or in the still-room or kitchen, and Roger, feeling it incumbent on him to speak, turned on Kezia.

"Those that I suffer in my house, Mistress Kezia," he said, "are my own flesh and blood. Is it my mother that you would have me turn adrift? 'Twould break her heart and mine. And whither, pray you, should I send her?"

"Oh, that I know not," returned Kezia, easily. "Neither meant I to testify thus straitly against her. It needs not that she should leave you. Lies it not in your power to turn her from her evil ways, with reading of the scripture and prayer?"

"Ay, there it is," chimed in Master Burroughs, who had now joined them, and took up his daughter's words. "Neglect not the gift that is in you to edification, my son. An I knew not that you are verily one of the Lord's children, I should account you a Malignant yourself, for harbouring two such rank Prelatists as Mistress Sparowe and Walter. Nay, if report speak true, thy brother is even more than a Prelatist and a Malignant."

Walter again! Was Roger never to hear the last of his scapegrace younger brother?

"I pray you, sir, speak no more of it," he cried, crimson with pain and perplexity. "My brother will doubtless not remain long with me. He passeth his time in hunting and drinking, and of his own will he cannot chose but leave us, when liberty in such things is denied him. But my mother—she hath lived in the house all her life. How can I send her away? 'Twould be to her death."

"And her remaining is death to your soul, my son. You are yet enslaved by the motions of the flesh. Hear now a word I have for thee from the Lord. 'Love not the world, neither the things of the world.'"

"'If any man love the world,'"—Kezia completed the text, afraid lest her father should miss a tittle of the application,—"'The love of the Father is not in him.' Good Master Sparowe," she continued, blandly, "you

are blinded by the carnal love of your mother, and see not the wrong you do unto your heavenly Father. Bethink you, ere it be too late, and flee from the wrath to come.

Neither Kezia nor Master Burroughs meant any impertinence by these words. Their feelings towards Roger were merely those of sincere, if somewhat outspoken friendship. It seemed to them that he was wilfully courting destruction, and they held themselves bound to speak.

Fortunately at this moment the painful conversation was interrupted. They had now entered the dining hall, a long room, which ran the whole length of the house. The lofty roof was closed with heavy oaken rafters, the floor uncarpeted, and the walls were hung with tapestry. Here all the maids and serving men were drawn up in two rows, waiting for the devotional service which always began the day. It was not usual to take this religious exercise, as it was called, so late in the forenoon. But Master Burroughs and Mistress Kezia had ridden off early that morning to a village at some distance, to hear a noted preacher. The household, therefore, had been bidden to assemble on their return, summoned by the great bell of the house, which had been clanging vigorously for some minutes.

Everyone was ranked in their places, according to age and degree, and Mistress Kezia was scanning the well-ordered rows, to assure herself that neither man nor maid was missing, when a side door opened, and a young girl came in. She was tall and slender, with hair brown in the shade, golden as it caught a ray of sunlight though a window. Her features bore a family likeness to Kezia's, but were cast in a larger and softer mould, and her forehead was broad and smooth. Her mouth belied the grave expression of the rest of her face. It was not a Puritan mouth at all. The lips were full and rich, the upper lip delicately arched "like Cupid's bow," as someone had once unluckily whispered in Kezia's hearing. Whereupon that godly maiden had been moved to such a pitch of righteous indignation, that she

thenceforth regarded her sister almost in a semi-pagan light.

Since then Alice had often been chidden for her mouth, and for the foolish habit it had of smiling at all the world. Sometimes, when she wished to be especially impressive, Kezia would assure Alice that her mouth alone was a sign of the evil within. Then the lips would quiver, and the corners of the offending mouth would turn down in real earnest, and Alice would begin to cry. Whereupon Master Burroughs, who, stern as he was, had a lurking fondness for his tender younger daughter, would bid Kezia desist, and kiss the poor mouth back into a smile.

Nothing could exceed the serious gravity of Alice's face to-day, as she took her seat. Her lips trembled a little as she passed Roger, but she did not raise her head; while he, for his part, dared not even look at her. Only, there came a sparkle into his eyes, which were decorously fixed on Master Burroughs, and a smile flitted across his face.

The service concluded with the solemn salutation: "The Lord be with you," addressed to each member of the family in turn, and, this simple ceremony over, Roger came eagerly across the room.

"Good day to you, Mistress Alice," he said. "You thought not, doubtless, to see me here."

"We are right glad to see you at any time, Master Sparowe," she answered, demurely. "My father maketh you always heartily welcome."

"Yea, a better friend can no man desire. And you?"

"My father's friends are mine," she replied, her eyes still on the ground. "It becomes not a daughter to have any others. And tell me now, sir, how you have fared."

"Well and ill," answered Roger. "The Assembly of Divines hath refused my petition, and will not that Master Sturges be removed, whereat your father and my mother, strangely enough, will both rejoice. 'Twas meet, doubtless, that ill success should befall me, but I grieve that the man remains. The Lord overrule all to His glory!"

Alice looked at Roger Sparowe a moment in perplexity.

"Grave cause must you have, I trow, to seek his dismissal. My father saith that you wrong this holy man, Master Sparowe. Is it so?"

"No, Mistress Alice, I do not wrong him," answered Roger, sighing. "An I could tell all I know"—he glanced hurriedly round him—"peradventure I should be blamed for overmuch mildness."

Alice flushed scarlet. "Oh, sir, I meant not to rebuke you; I pray you, mistake me not," she replied, hastily. "I know that these be times when a man must walk according to his own conscience, not another's. If but the inward light be pure, and the guidance clear"—

"Alas, my light is never pure!" interrupted Roger. Then seeing her look of astonishment he added: "Sweet mistress, an I had but guidance . . . this guidance whereof you speak," . . .

"'Twas an inward guidance I meant," said Alice, confused by his earnest look.

"Ay, inward, but sometimes vouchsafed to us by earthly means. But as touching this matter of Master Sturges, some day it may be that I can speak plainly to you thereof. Till then, I pray you, trust me."

Alice did not answer, but she gave Roger a look which made his heart leap. At this moment Kezia struck in. She had already been meditating an interruption of the talk which, with the hesitation, and frequent changes of colour, looked far less innocent than it really was.

"Alice," quoth she, "hast finished the work in the buttery?"

"Yea, sister, 'tis done," answered Alice.

"All of it?" questioned Kezia. "Hast given orders for the killing of those pigs?"

"Nay, I left that to thee," replied her sister, with a little shudder.

"Ay, I thought thou wouldest neglect it. I pray you, Master Sparowe," she said, turning to Roger, "suffer my sister to go. I being from home, these household matters were left in her charge, and she hath over-

looked them. We shall have no pork at Michaelmas. an the pigs be not killed to-day."

"I, too, must go, Mistress Kezia," said Roger. "I have an hour's riding before me, and the sun is already high. Pray you, bid them bring my horse."

Roger would not have been in such a hurry to start, had not Alice already disappeared. He did not refuse a tankard of home-brewed ale, and having quaffed it, he bade farewell to father and daughter, sprang into the saddle, and rode off.

Matters went always thus at Mote End, Roger ruefully said to himself, as he put his horse to a brisk trot. Interminable controversies with Master Burroughs and Kezia, discussions of texts, lasting sometimes for hours, the distasteful topic of his weak compliance with his mother's schismatical ways continually thrust upon him; —and as a reward, half a dozen words hastily snatched with Alice, and one soft look from her eyes. Weeks would pass, perhaps, before he had the chance of another. Such was the history of Roger's visits to Mote End. This had been his life for many months past, yet on food so poor he had contrived to nourish hope and love.

CHAPTER IV.

HOME COMING.

Two hundred years ago the river Orwell did not run through, but at the foot of the good town of Ipswich. The original site of the town was on a rising ground to the north-east, from whence an almost unbroken line of churches and houses stretched to the river.

Like most towns of that day, Ipswich boasted of a goodly number of noble buildings. With a population which, in our time, would reduce it to the rank of a village, it was nevertheless filled, not only with fine churches, but with splendid private mansions. People did not go to London more than once or twice in a lifetime. Noblemen and gentlemen spent their lives and their incomes on their own estates, and among their own people, and had their palaces in the county town. Hence the number of beautiful houses in Ipswich and other old English towns, now often degraded into shops and taverns, but which were in those days the ancestral homes of the upper classes.

At just such a house, standing opposite one church, with another immediately in the rear, did Roger at last alight. It was a fine house about a hundred years old, distinguished even then for the splendour of its architecture. The walls were of brick, and covered with white plaster, a style much in vogue. It was called "pargetting" or "pargettry" work. In this house the plaster was moulded into elaborate figures of fat cherubs and giants, fiends and pigmies, and other monstrosities of the Renaissance period. Timber was scarce in the country, and wood entered very little into the composition of the houses. Here it was only employed to outline with quaint carving the picturesque gables which fronted the street. There were nine gables in all, which some profane wit, in earlier days, when a chance

allusion to heathen mythology was still permitted, had likened to the nine Muses. Whoever thus personified them was a sharp-sighted man as well as a mirthful talker, for the ninth gable was hidden away at the back, and crowded almost out of sight by the graceful curves and angles of the building.

Placed in the heart of a thriving town, there was no need to fortify this house, like the mansion at Mote End, and indeed the hospitable doors, in the summer time, stood open all day long. As Roger rode up he had to thread his way carefully between booths and carts, huge baskets of screaming cocks and hens and live fish, and low tables on trestles, on which, and on the ground, all manner of dairy produce, butter, cheese, and eggs, were displayed. For in this space, opposite the house, and filling all the ground between it and the church, was the town market; and here, almost every day in the week, a rustic fair was held.

At the door of the house, watching one of her maids, who was bargaining with a country woman at a little distance, stood a graceful dame, hardly yet old, though her beautiful hair was streaked with grey. It was not arranged in ringlets according to the prevailing fashion, but carefully dressed in rolls under a rich black lace cap or mantilla. Beneath it a pair of clear hazel eyes, still undimmed, and full of sweetness, looked out brightly at the world; while the mouth, soft as a baby's, had just a pathetic droop at the corners which gave a touch of feeling to the face it would otherwise have lacked.

The figure of this charming lady was as graceful and slender as her face was youthful. It was set off to the best advantage by a soft, rich coloured gown, confined at the waist with a girdle, and flowing thence to the feet in simple folds. In front the bodice parted over an undervest of clear, white lawn, which was turned back with rich lace at the throat. This warm August morning the lace had been left a little open, and the brooch which always closed it, a brooch Roger could remember since he was a baby, with his father's hair in it, was clasped lower down on the bosom of the dress.

"Well, lady mother," he said, a smile for a moment lighting up his grave face as he stooped to kiss her hand, "here am I, thou seest, back within the time thou gavest me. Didst not say to-day at noon? And thou art at thy marketing again, forsooth! Was ever such a housewife known?"

"Welcome, my son," she said, as she raised him, and kissed him with pretty ceremony on the forehead: "welcome whene'er thou comest. My sons are as the sunshine to me. Prithee go not often from home. Thine old mother misses thee sorely."

"Old!" echoed Roger, with a little laugh. "Thou hast aged then since last I saw thee, for I left the blythest and youngest mother of her years in England. Hath all gone well?" he continued, anxiously.

Mistress Sparowe's face clouded. "Well ay. Why dost thou ask? Wherefore should anything be amiss?" she answered, avoiding his eyes. "Hast heard anything?"

"Nay, I did but ask," said Roger, smiling at his mother's anxious face.

"Then cease thine asking, and come within, and tell me how thou hast fared in London."

By this time one of the serving men had led off Roger's horse to the stable in the rear. The young man followed his mother into the large hall which formed the whole front of the building. Here several of the maids were preparing the midday meal, which was the principal repast of the day. Crossing the hall, mother and son passed on to the noble flight of oaken stairs, richly carved, which led to the upper rooms.

"Not there, mother," said Roger, stopping her as she was about to mount. "Here in the withdrawing room I can tell thee all there is to tell. There is not much."

Roger sighed, and the wistful, unquiet look his face usually wore settled on it again. The momentary pleasure of meeting his mother was over. Things were never well with him for long at home. Strive as he would to be honest and upright in his dealings, as became one of the "godly," he was perpetually hindered by the schism in his own household. With their strong Royalist

tendencies it was impossible but that his mother and brother, if they did not actively thwart his plans, should wish them to fail. Roger had always the miserable sense that things were done in secret, behind his back, which it behoved him to know; and his difficulties were increased by his almost idolatrous devotion to his mother, a devotion which his Puritan friends were not slow to tell him was almost sinful. The feeling of deception was painfully heightened by his last discovery at Colchester.

Dame Margaret, too, had her cares, and her face was graver than usual as she asked, anxiously: "And how hath thy business sped my son?"

"Failed, utterly failed," said Roger, flinging himself into a chair. "The Assembly would scarce give me so much as a hearing. They began to question mine own orthodoxy, and I had to make mention of my father's services to stop them. Ah, mother, I have griefs that none wot of. As for Master Sturges, he must e'en stay, since they will have it so, and work us what harm he can."

Roger had made up his mind that his mother should learn nothing from him of his latest trouble. He always sedulously kept all evil talk from her ears, but he could not wholly control himself to-day. Mistress Margaret looked at him in surprise.

"Never have I understood thy bitterness against Master Sturges, Roger," she said, after a moment's pause. "A worthy preacher of the Word, a godly man, one well looked on by all in the town, and thou, a Puritan thyself, wilt have no dealings with him! 'Tis passing strange."

"An he were all thou sayest, 'twere more than strange that I should be thus evilly-minded towards him," answered Roger. "But mother, thou knowest, as I do, that it is so only in outward seeming."

Mistress Sparowe dropped her eyes, and blushed, but recovering herself in a moment, she continued: "'Twill be good news to him that he is to remain, albeit he saith that he is willing to go or stay, the holy man. I shall have the joy of telling him first thereof."

"How! wilt thou go to him?" asked Roger, frowning.

"Nay, he will be here anon. He dines with us to-day."

"He will be here?" repeated Roger, in a reproachful tone. "He cometh hither, the very day of my return? Mother, hast thou done this?"

"I knew not thou wert coming, my son," faltered Mistress Margaret. "I thought perchance, thou wouldst be delayed."

"But thou knowest that, whether present or absent, I desire not his company. Neither I nor my household should have dealings with him."

"Thou art too stern, Roger," replied his mother. "I was compelled to ask him for a special reason. Nay, knit not thy brows at me. Thou shalt—thou must hear thereof anon."

"Ah, mother, mother," cried Roger, bitterly; "who hath been at work here while I was absent? What hast thou done, thou, and Walter, and Master Sturges? Are ye all in league against me?"

Dame Margaret hated everything that threatened to be unpleasant, and was determined to stave off as long as possible the disagreeable explanation which she knew to be impending.

"Now, thou art at thine old trick of fault-finding again, Roger!" she exclaimed, plaintively. "In good time thou shalt know all, only hurry me not. Prithee tell me first, didst thou verily spend all thy time at Westminster, on thy doleful errand! Didst see nought else in London? Hast brought no news? no talk of fashions, wherewith to amuse thy mother, who is moped to death in this country place?"

"Fashions, mother!" echoed Roger, drearily. "Nay, I thought not of fashions. I could not discourse thereof, an I had seen a countess in her bravest attire. Some new devices in head pieces I examined... But the fashion we need is the fashion of repentance, that we should turn with all our hearts unto the Lord, if haply He will have mercy upon us."

"Didst have speech of Ralph Wentworth?" inquired Mistress Margaret, who always tried to stop Roger, when he discoursed in this strain.

"Yea, I saw Ralph. How didst thou know that I purposed to see him? And he hath refused my counsel and warning, and hath gone to join the King of Scots."

"Ah!" exclaimed Mistress Sparowe. "I knew of a surety he would go. And how went he? with whom? Had he companions? Didst thou take note of the way he journeyed?"

"Nay: wherefore should I?" replied Roger, surprised at her eagerness. "He went, that alone did concern me. He would not stay for all my pleadings. We are not like to follow him, any of us, I trow. He is gone for ever. For either he will be slain, or taken prisoner, or compelled to flee beyond the seas. For once I wished myself not well of my lame foot, since now we cannot cross swords with each other."

Before Dame Margaret could answer, the door from the hall was pushed open, and a young man sauntered carelessly into the room.

"Ah, Roger, thou art there," he said, recognizing Roger with a start. "Methought I heard thy voice in the hall. The Fates will have it, then, that we meet once more. Mother"—he turned to her—"there lacks a strap to my gorget. Prithee let one of the men run with speed to the blacksmith's for it."

Roger sprang to his feet, and looked at his brother in unfeigned astonishment. "We meet once more, sayest thou? and thou in this guise?" He pointed to the other's buff jerkin and pistols. "Whither goest thou, Walter, thus armed?" he asked, hastily. "Before thou undertake a journey, 'twere well surely to speak with me."

"Thou wert from home," answered Walter Sparowe, sullenly, "and the matter pressed. The need was urgent for us to be gone at once. Hath my mother told thee nought?"

"Thy brother is but now come," replied Mistress Margaret, rising; "and I have scarce had speech with him yet. Prithee tell him thy news thyself, and I meanwhile will see to thy gear." And, gathering up

her dress, Mistress Margaret tripped from the room, inwardly congratulating herself on having escaped the coming storm.

It was impossible to imagine a greater contrast than Roger and Walter Sparowe presented. Roger's spare, slender figure was always drawn up to its full height, in the half conscious endeavour to make the most of it; Walter was tall and largely made, with a habitual stoop, and already inclined to the corpulence which had been a distinguishing characteristic of most of the Sparowes for generations. He was only one and twenty, and thus three or four years younger than Roger, but his figure made him look the older of the two. He had a high, smooth forehead, large, feebly-moulded chin, and aquiline nose, features which were repeated with more or less variation in the ancestral portraits round the room.

As handsome as Roger was plain, his face nevertheless on close inspection gave a certain, not altogether pleasing, impression of weakness and indecision. His small, well-shaped mouth, the upper lip just touched with a light down, added to his effeminate appearance. He wore his beautiful hair in soft ringlets, which fell to the shoulder over a rich lace collar. The same costly lace was turned back at the wrist from his white, shapely hands. It was a somewhat incongruous addition to the stout coat made of buffalo leather, with which every man who went to war was provided. But it was the fashion of the Cavaliers to affect this dainty attire, even in battle.

The two brothers looked at each other askance. Both were conscious of a disagreeable secret which it was necessary for the other to know, but which neither cared to tell. At length Walter tossed his long gloves down on the table, and said, with assumed carelessness: "I go from hence to-day, Roger."

"Thou doest well to tell me now," rejoined Roger, angrily, "when it is too late to hinder thy journey. May thine elder brother, forsooth, be permitted to ask whither?"

"Whither, but there where it behoves every true and loyal man to be"—Walter raised his head defiantly—"I have engaged myself to join the army of our Sovereign lord the King."

"Charles Stuart! the King of Scots! To go to him!" cried Roger, aghast. "Nay, Walter, it shall not be. Never while I am master in this house shall one go from it to ally himself with the man of sin. I forbid it thee."

Walter laughed bitterly. "Thou forbid it, forsooth! And by what right dost thou forbid it? Our father's death hath made thee master here, but not master of mine actions. I am free to come and go as I list." The young man drew himself up as he spoke, and towered over his brother in his indignation.

"Free, aye," groaned Roger, flinging himself into a chair. "Free, as thou sayest. Free to rush to thine own destruction, as Ralph hath done, and dishonour me for ever. Have I no claim then on thee?"

"None, if thou dost think to hold me back," said Walter. "I' faith, thou hast not made me so welcome in thine house of late, that I should desire to remain. Mine honour and duty call me."

"Thou goest to certain ruin."

"Ruin, fie! The tide hath turned, I tell thee. The king will soon come into his own again, and these Puritan knaves shall have their deserts. We will drive them out and make them quit their ill-gotten gains. And then, when thy brother returns in triumph, thou wilt be fain to creep to him, and pray him to speak a word on thy behalf."

"Oh, fools, fools, all of ye!" groaned Roger. "It is not as thou sayest, Walter. We are strong as ever, and the Lord General hath never been beaten yet."

Walter laughed derisively. "And how, if he were beaten now?" he asked. "Thou canst not deny it, Roger. Our army hath given him the slip. This once, at least, he hath been foiled."

"For some good purpose he hath suffered the Scottish army to pass him, but there is no man in England who doubts him. And the issue is sure. For thou and thy

fellows, Walter, trust in an arm of flesh, but with us is the Lord of Hosts."

Walter turned on his heel, and paced the room angrily. Like Wentworth, he could not bear this sanctimonious phraseology from Roger's lips. It always seemed to drive him to fury.

"And how wilt thou restrain me?" he asked. "Wilt thou use force? for I tell thee plainly, by suasion shalt thou effect nothing. Good, then. Bid the men who have served me from childhood guard the door, that their young master may not go forth, and fight for his king. Or turn informer, if it like thee, and hail me before the town council, that they may put me in ward, because I will not forswear all honour and loyalty to my country. Thou art a justice thyself; the thing is easy."

Never before had the indolent Walter worked himself up into such a tempest of wrath. He walked to and fro, hurling bitter words at his brother, while Roger sat with face in his hands.

"I cannot do it, thou sayest, truly; I cannot do it," he muttered, "no, not if I give half my fortune to keep thee. And I, a Puritan, well reported of among the godly in the town! Disgraced and put to confusion, by mine own kindred."

"Thou hadst no call to be a Puritan," retorted Walter. "Wherefore couldst thou not adhere to the traditions of our house? Our ancestors did good service to the king, ay, and sealed it with their blood at Hexham and Bosworth, as I am ready to do now. What spirit possessed our father to take part with the fanatics, and to join himself with that arch-traitor Cromwell?"

"Hold!" cried Roger, fiercely, springing to his feet. "Thou shalt not speak those honoured names thus lightly. Thou art not worthy to loose the shoe latchet of our saintly father. Such as thou wilt never know what it cost him to eschew the evil and pursue the good. 'Twas a nature, the depths whereof thou couldst never sound; and such another is my Lord General."

Walter felt that he had gained his point, and was in no mood to prolong the discussion. At this moment, to

his secret relief, the great house bell rang, notifying to all that the hour of noon had arrived, and with it the one great meal of the day. Roger rose from his seat, and stood for a few minutes by the table, trying to compose himself. Walter gathered up his gloves, and was on his way to the hall, whistling a tune, when Roger stopped him.

"A moment more, Walter," he said, earnestly, "Our mother saith that the Reverend Mr. Sturges cometh here to-day, to dine with us. Is this thy doing?"

"No, 'twas our mother who asked him," answered Walter, readily. "It seemed meet that he should come to bid me farewell, and"—he glanced round the room, and lowered his voice—"to provide me with some matters I needed."

"Ay, I understand thee, with credentials," replied Roger, bitterly. "Credentials from such as he to mine own brother, and the son of so godly a father. It is he, then, who hath urged thee to this journey in mine absence. Deny it not, Walter. He hath worked on thy youth and innocence, and thou hast listened greedily to his words. I cannot stop his false, honied tongue," he continued mournfully, "nor thine ears from giving heed to it. But here in this house it shall not be. How didst thou presume to ask him, when thou knowest that I will not suffer it?"

"Our mother would have it so," said Walter, shrugging his shoulders. "She hath a marvellous love and affection for this man, at which I wonder oftentimes seeing she knoweth him not fully."

"But thou who dost know him, how canst thou lend thyself to the deception daily practiced upon her, and upon the whole town?" said Roger, hotly. "Hast thou no truth or honour in thee, that thou dost seek the company of one whose whole life is a lie?"

Walter started up fiercely, and for a moment it seemed as if the quarrel between the brothers must come to blows, but he controlled himself.

"There may be reasons for that I do," he said. "Prithee leave me in peace, and inquire not too closely

concerning me. As for this man," he continued, in a more conciliatory tone, warned by a look of indignant surprise from Roger, "he liveth peaceably and giveth offence to none. If thou dost bruit abroad that thou knowest, it may cost him his neck, and thou wilt be guilty of his blood. And in any case while he is here we cannot have some canting Puritan knave thrust upon us."

With this parting shot, Walter sprang up a short flight of steps, and entered the entrance hall. Here the mid-day meal was prepared at a table in the centre. For some years after the house was built, the good old practice had still obtained that the whole household, masters and servants, should dine together. But this custom had long fallen into disuse; and Walter, as he came from the withdrawing room, found no one at the table but his mother and a sleek, smooth-faced man, to whom she was talking eagerly.

There was nothing at first sight to distinguish the Reverend Obadiah Sturges, the subject of such passionate controversy in the Sparowe family, from any other godly minister. His dress was ostentatiously clerical—a black Genevan gown, and snow-white collar and bands. He was of middle height, his features unexpressive, his light blue eyes almost devoid of animation. His head was small, and looked still smaller, because of the tight-fitting black skull cap he always wore, which scarcely allowed his close-cropped hair to be seen. These caps, coming down low over the ears, were much affected by elderly men in those days. Perhaps the Reverend Master Obadiah was somewhat more unctuous in speech and larded his discourse more freely with Biblical phraseology, than was held to be necessary; bet this was accounted, by his more ardent followers, as a sign of a godly disposition. To any one who had heard the hot discussions concerning him in the Sparowe household, and throughout the town, and had known that Roger's journey to London had been undertaken with no other object than to effect his removal, the sight of the minister himself was disappointing. It seemed incredible that so

insignificant a man should possess so much influence or be worthy of so many heart burnings.

The meal proceeded almost in silence. Roger was in no mood for conversation. Although their intercourse had been already strained to the verge of a quarrel, he knew that he must have further speech of his brother before he went. Walter, who was secretly afraid of his stern elder brother when he chose to assert his authority, maintained a discreet silence; while the Reverend Obadiah, never a man of many words, was more than usually quiet.

Nevertheless he played his part manfully in the main business of the meal. Saint as he was, even his admirers could not deny that he was not above a certain serene enjoyment of the good things of this life, and the bountiful hospitality of the "Old House" was never lost upon him.

"Is it permitted me to ask how you fared in London, Master Sparowe?" he said at last, in the monotonous nasal tone many of the Puritans had contracted. "Hath it been granted you to help towards the Lord's work?"

Master Obadiah spoke as if he had only a gentle interest in the matter, but Roger, glancing up, saw a slight quiver of his thin lips, and knew instantly that the Puritan was as well aware of the purport of his journey as he was himself.

"I fared well or ill, sir, as it may like you to take it," he answered, with the visible constraint he was always compelled to put upon himself whenever he addressed the minister.

"Saw you your friend?"

"Yea, and did nought with him. He would not heed me," answered Roger, moodily. "He hath gone to the fight."

Only Roger, who was watching Master Sturges sharply, saw him nod his head softly, as if the news were not wholly unexpected.

"Roger is grieved for his friend," said Mistress Margaret; "but I tell him all will soon be well again. It is right that he should not go to the war, for assuredly

the Roundheads will soon be defeated. And then England will join as one man to welcome her king."

"Amen, noble lady, if he come in the name of the Lord," rejoined Master Sturges, with much fervour. "If he will submit himself to our godly ministers here, as he hath done already in Scotland, I doubt not the Lord will restore him."

Mistress Margaret gazed at the speaker in a perplexed way for a moment, but seeing that he returned her look with perfect equanimity, she recovered her composure. Undoubtedly she was the most cheerful of the four to-day. She was grieved to part with her younger son on so dangerous a mission, but, naturally sanguine, she did not realize to what he would be exposed. She was sure there would be no battle. The sight of the young king would disarm all opposition, and he would soon be able to enter London in triumph. The Puritan faction—Mistress Margaret could never understand that the Puritan faction had grown into a victorious and all-powerful nation—would be disposed of in some comfortable way, Roger would be persuaded to give up his praying and Psalm singing, and Walter would easily make peace for him with the Royalists.

So she chatted gaily on, relieved to find that the announcement of Walter's departure had apparently not led to an open breach between the brothers, though both sat moody and silent. She rallied Roger on his grave face, and loaded Walter with tender little motherly directions for his health and comfort, not one of which he was likely to remember. In the fulness of her satisfaction she submitted, without a sigh, to the lengthy grace with which Mr. Sturges concluded the meal. Mistress Margaret flattered herself that all danger of a collision was over. She was struck with consternation, therefore, to hear Roger say, sternly, as Walter sprang impatiently up:—

"A word further with thee, brother."

With a beating heart, Walter followed Roger once more into the withdrawing room, and through it to a long, low room, lined with oaken wainscotting, richly carved

from floor to ceiling, which looked into the garden at the back of the house. Like his mother, he had fancied that all fear of opposition was past. He ran hastily over in his mind the possible points of difference between him and his brother. His departure to join the Royalist army, the unwelcome presence of Master Sturges—Roger had acquiesced in all these, with however bad a grace. But, for all his gay careless nature, there were certain passages in Walter's life which not for the whole world would he have wished Roger to hear of. His brother's rigid Puritanism, and the distracted circumstances of the times, had made a conspirator of him, almost against his will. With ill-concealed anxiety, therefore, he waited for Roger to speak.

But Roger seemed in no hurry to begin his unpleasant communication. He walked to the window and looked out into the garden—a small, carefully cultivated enclosure between high walls, just now flooded with the brilliant light of the noonday sun. Then he came back to the great hearth at the further end of the room, his lameness showing the plainer as he walked, because he was wearied with his journey.

"Walter," he began at last, in a husky voice, his eyes fixed on the empty hearth, "I have somewhat more to say to thee. Prithee come here"—as he heard his brother moving about at the other end of the room—"and give heed to me. That which I have to speak of concerns thee much."

Walter came forward, and flung himself sulkily down upon a settle in the chimney corner.

"My time is short," he said. "Pray thee, brother, speak briefly, and to the point. Or, better still, speak not at all. Wherefore should our parting be further embittered?"

"Nay, I must speak, I dare not leave it. Think not thus to escape me," said Roger, angrily. "Last night, Walter, I lay at Colchester—at the 'Bull' inn."

Walter started, but did not speak, and Roger continued: "Dost know who lives at the 'Bull' inn, at Colchester, or do I need to tell thee?"

Walter twisted uneasily on the settle, but still maintained an obstinate silence. "Thou dost put me then to the shame of speaking that I scarce know how to utter," continued Roger, his pale face crimson with agitation. "Thou mightest have spared me, or at least have met me half-way, if thou knowest aught thereof. A woman lives there—I know not her name—who saith she is—thy wife!"

"Never!" exclaimed Walter, springing to his feet. "The impudent hussy! Hath she dared to speak? 'Tis a lie, an infamous lie! I will confront her with it, and thrust it down her throat."

"It is not true, then," said Roger, looking up with an expression of intense relief. "She hath slandered thee? Oh! shame upon me, that I gave her credence. Forgive me, brother. For a moment she spoke so stoutly, I believed it of thee."

Roger stretched out his hand, but Walter did not take it.

"How meanest thou, Roger?" he said, stiffly, avoiding his brother's eyes. "Let me know first whereof I am accused. This woman, what said she to thee? What crime did she lay to my charge?"

"Nay, what signifieth what she said, since thou hast declared it untrue? Wherefore should we talk of crime? Thou hast not done her this wrong, let that suffice us both. Oh! Walter, I knew it well. I told her she mistook us. That a Sparowe would never so far forget the honour of his house, as to give to such as her the right to be his wife."

"As for right," returned Walter, uneasily, "'tis a nice question, that. These women be hard to pacify. Give them an inch, and they will take an ell. Let them think they have the least claim upon you, and, look you, they push it to the utmost."

"Walter!" Roger stopped his brother with a look of horror. "What meanest thou? Tell me, I beseech thee, the whole truth for once, if thou hast never told it before. Hath this woman any claim upon thee?"

"Nay, how should I know?" answered Walter. "Thou dost press me too hard. Thou art a saint thyself. Ye

are all saints, ye Puritans, and ye have no pity for our faults. Ye know naught of the temptations which beset us."

"It is not true—it cannot be true!" muttered Roger. "Oh, Walter, purify thy soul by penitence!"

Walter laughed. "'Tis no such great crime, after all. Thou art a fool, Roger, for all thy sainthood. May not a man kiss a pretty girl, but thou must move heaven and earth to punish him?"

"Walter!" Roger seemed to shrink from the sound of his own voice, as he crouched back in the chimney corner. "An this be true, as thou dost drive me to think—for even now thou wilt not reveal the whole matter—we are brothers no longer. I have rebuked thee. Henceforth thou art to me as an heathen man and a publican. But, oh! once more, I conjure thee, speak, if it be not true."

There was dead silence for a moment. Walter turned sullenly away, and began to pace the room.

"Thou hast broken God's law," said Roger solemnly, after a long pause. "Beside that, 'tis a small matter that the honour of our noble house is stained. Thou art no longer fit to dwell beneath the same roof as our pure mother."

"Cast me out, then," cried Walter, vehemently. "Drive me forth from the home where thou and I have dwelt as children. Cut the link that binds us! In good sooth," he went on with a bitter smile, "my saintly brother hath well chosen his time to send me adrift, when I am about to hazard life and limb. The world will not judge me so hardly. 'Tis but a little sin. None but thou had thought it worthy of mention; thou wilt make of it, meseems, a life-long quarrel."

"Repair it, then. Marry her who in the sight of the Lord is already thy wife."

"No, for ten thousand crowns, no," cried Walter, "What, marry such an one? Force our lady mother, daily and hourly, to bear her company. Nay, if I did it, thou mightest then cry shame on me. 'Twould be a stain on our noble shield, such as it hath never yet known."

"Thou hast stained it already," answered Roger. "The soil is there, whether thou wilt see it or no."

"Prithee, cease thy sermon," said Walter, striding to the door. "Time presseth. I must be gone, and have yet to bid farewell to my mother."

"Ay, we do but waste words," sighed Roger. "Hear me, then, Walter. Our father's house shall still be open to thee. Thou shalt not be cut adrift, as thou sayest. Come when thou wilt, for our mother's sake, the door shall not be closed upon thee, but speech from me thou shalt not have again. Until thou repair the evil thou hast done—if that may ever be—seek me no furthur. I will pray for thee. Night and day I will beseech the Lord that He be gracious unto thee, and deliver thee from the bond of this sin. But from this day forth we have no further concern one with the other. Walter, farewell."

And with one look, more of sorrow than anger, at his brother, Roger passed from the room, and went slowly up the great oaken staircase to his own chamber. Here he was wont to spend hours every day in lonely meditation, or in agonized wrestlings upon his knees, the open Bible before him; and here he flung himself down in a tumult of feeling, too much agitated to frame a single prayer. He did not re-appear in the household, not even, as the servants thought he might have done, to bid his brother a last farewell. He left the charge of speeding him on his journey to his mother and Master Sturges. And every one stood too much in awe of the young squire's solitary retirement, to break in upon it. Perhaps he was jealous of his brother, whispered the serving men to each other, as they stood watching the handsome young fellow ride off, attended by a couple of well-armed varlets, to join his companions outside the town. But at least the Master might have come to comfort his mother, and to lead her away when, in spite of her boasted courage, her spirits failed, and she burst into piteous sobs as she waved farewell to the traveller.

CHAPTER V.

THE CHIMNEY RECESS.

THE great dissension between Cavaliers and Puritans, which had convulsed all England for the last ten years, was no new thing in the Sparowe family. There, as elsewhere, it might truly be said that a man's foes were they of his own household. Robert Sparowe, the father of Roger and Walter, was a man whose name was always mentioned with tender love and sorrow by his wife and children, and with reverence in the town. He had been a Puritan all his life, though he came of a Cavalier stock. He was one of a large family, most of whom had died young. Much of his childhood had been spent in the house of a maiden aunt, the daughter of a certain Judge Clench, who had been a noted man among what we might call the Low Church party in the reign of Queen Elizabeth.

Robert Sparowe, growing to manhood amid the varied influences of the great city of London, had been an eye-witness of the terror caused by the discovery of the Gunpowder Plot. The effect upon him was vivid and permanent. The dread of Popery, which grew in time among the Puritans to an almost unreasoning horror, took possession of him, and coloured all his life. He soon recoiled, not only from Catholicism, but from those rites and ceremonies which the Church of England had retained, and which seemed to him only another disguise of the scarlet woman of Babylon.

Church and dissent were not then marked off into the broad divisions which have parted them since the Restoration. Those who actually dissented from the established religion, Anabaptists, Quakers, and the like, were looked upon with quite as much horror by the Puritans, or Low Churchmen, as by the Laudites.

They were branded as heretics, and both parties joined in persecuting them rigorously. The word dissenter was unknown; the Puritans still formed part of the National Church. Robert Sparowe punctually attended the services in the parish church—was even churchwarden and filled other offices of a like nature, but always with a growing horror of the Romanizing tendencies fostered by Archbishop Laud. Outwardly he belonged to the Church of his fathers, in which he had been brought up. There was no recognised sect beyond the ecclesiastical pale, to which a man who valued his reputation as a Christian could adhere. But he began to feel towards the Anglican liturgy, and the hierarchical form of government, that fierce hatred which distinguished all the Puritans, and which caused the abolition of the English Church, as soon as the rival party was in power.

While these opposing forces were at work, poor foolish King James died, and Charles I.—young, graceful, clever, and gifted with all the strange, personal fascination of the Stuarts—came to the throne. Just about this time Robert Sparowe, who, by the death of several brothers, had become the head of the house, took to himself a wife. Not such a staid, God-fearing maiden as the Puritan party in the town, to whom he had already allied himself, hoped and expected. He fixed his fancy on a charming, lovely girl, who came of an old but impoverished county family, had nothing but her pretty face and sweet ways to recommend her, and had been bred in the highest and stiffest Anglicanism.

With her the grave and pious Master Robert Sparowe fell "over head and ears" in love. In a short time he wooed and won her, and to the day of his death she remained the idol of his heart.

It is possible that the new wife might, as was feared, have drawn Master Sparowe away from his rigid profession of religion had he not, a few years later, formed a friendship which, like his passionate love for his wife, lasted for the rest of his life. There was a certain quiet, rough, country gentleman, living at Huntingdon, within two days' ride of Ipswich, who was

already beginning to be recognised as a man of weight in the country. It was by accident that Robert Sparowe first met this same Mr. Cromwell, and was attracted at once, despite his homely appearance, by his singular earnestness, and the power and depth of his character. From henceforth the young man knew what it was to have a friend. The intimacy ripened slowly but surely, and the strength and comfort which, as time went on, he felt to be lacking in his own home, were supplied by the wise counsels of the squire of Huntingdon.

It was to follow his friend, as much as at the call of duty, that Master Sparowe, with a dozen well-armed retainers, joined the Parliament army, when the fierce religious and political differences between the king and the nation broke out at last into civil war. And all through the long, hot summers that followed, with their marchings and counter-marchings, battles and sieges, fruitless parleys and treaties, Robert Sparowe was always to the front. A man after the General's own heart, who talked little concerning the divine right of Prelates or Presbyters, but was always to be found where the fight raged hottest. Such as he were to be counted by thousands in the new modelled army, and they laid the foundations of the England of to-day.

One thing was wanting to Robert Sparowe's satisfaction. It had never fallen to his lot actually to serve under his friend, whose rare military qualifications he had always recognized. His wish was gratified at last. In the final struggle of the war, the terrible battle of Naseby, Master Sparowe received his death wound, as he led a company of pikemen to the charge. As he lay dying, the victorious general snatched a moment to press his friend's hand, and to bid him farewell. And to Robert Sparowe's failing ears it seemed as if he already heard his Lord's: "Well done, thou good and faithful servant."

It might have been expected that fair Mistress Margaret, amid such strange surroundings, would either have spent her life in perpetual opposition to her rigidly devout husband, or herself have imbibed something of his stern Puritanism. Neither one nor the other happened.

Bright and gay she was when her husband brought her to his ancestral home, and bright and gay she continued. She passed over the rough places of life with fairy footsteps. She sported with her husband's deep and earnest nature, only half-conscious of the love which transfigured it. As to her religion, it was made up for the most part of those outward shows and ceremonies, and the elaborate ritual which were so abhorrent to the Puritans. One thing only she hated with a fierce, deep hatred—not the gloomy fanatics themselves—how could she feel bitterly towards men who numbered among them her husband and son?—but the cruel creed which had dragged that husband from her, and had left her, still in the bloom of life, a widow.

The boys grew up amid these conflicting circumstances, and were influenced by them in opposite directions. In character, Roger was his father over again. Outwardly cold and reserved, but capable of strong, deep affection, he had from the first turned with a kind of instinct to Puritanism. As for Walter he seemed to be the very counterpart of his mother in his good looks, his airy disposition, and his abhorrence of everything that savoured of dullness. Life had not tested him yet, and no one, least of all himself, knew the real stuff of which he was made.

But Roger and Walter were not the only children to whom Master Sparowe hoped to hand down his name. A year after their marriage Dame Margaret presented her husband with a little daughter. Robert Sparowe, who had lost several sisters in early life, took the child home to his great, deep heart, and lavished a love upon her which, excellent father as he was, he never evinced for either of the two brothers who followed her. Between him and his little Mary—so he named her after his mother—there was one of those strong affinities often seen between mother and son, more rarely, perhaps, uniting father and daughter. Mary Sparowe was the pride of the house. She was beautiful as her mother, devout as her father; and she never caused him but one sorrow, when she fell madly in love, as he had done

before her, and gave her innocent maiden's heart into the keeping of the handsome young Cavalier, Ralph Wentworth.

The friendship between the houses of Sparowe and Wentworth had existed for 200 years, but they had never been united by marriage. There was a tradition among them that no such alliance could ever come to pass. Perhaps a touch of this superstition, though he always affected to despise it, mingled with Master Sparowe's exceeding abhorrence of a Royalist alliance for his daughter, and made him set himself so earnestly against it. All through the winter of 1644-45, while the two armies were in quarters, the matter was hotly debated. Much communication, in spite of the almost impassable roads, was carried on between the Wentworths in the North, and the Sparowes in the East. Then the war began again, a combat this time *à l'outrance*, for the new modelled Puritan army was burning for action. The head of both families were called to the field. Robert Sparowe parted with his daughter, not in anger—he had never been angry with her in his life—but grieved and heavy at heart. Six weeks after, his dead body was carried across the threshold of the home he had left in the fulness of health and vigour.

By some mischance, the news had not been broken to Mary Sparowe. She came in hastily, people said afterwards, unprepared for the sight, and when she saw her father's corpse she fell prostrate on it, in a swoon which lasted for hours. That fatal thrust at Naseby had been her death-wound too. She never rallied from the shock. Through the summer she bore her grief calmly, almost cheerfully, and sustained her mother, who was nearly prostrate beneath the blow. But, as the months went on, she grew whiter and thinner. When she knew that she was dying, she sent for Ralph Wentworth, and the lovers took a last farewell of each other. And when the first frosts of winter came, she fell nipped in the bud, like the late roses that bloomed outside her window. The old tradition had come true; the houses of Sparowe and Wentworth were not to be united.

These sad events could not fail to produce an effect upon the boys. The deep, religious tone of Roger's character was strengthened, and to it was joined a reverential feeling towards the dead father and sister, whose names he scarcely ventured to speak. Much of his love for them he transferred to Ralph Wentworth, who had been so closely associated with the family sorrows. From that day forth, in spite of his rigid Puritanism, he cherished for him an overweening affection. Walter, who was a boy at the time, naturally took the matter more lightly; and Roger, who thought he ought now to be in the place of a father to his younger brother, was often troubled with the idea that, through his own remissness, the dispensation had not been sufficiently blest to them both.

Notwithstanding the blight this double sorrow cast over their lives, the brothers grew up as healthy and vigorous as boys could be. Roger himself, with all the cares of a county magnate prematurely thrust upon him, often forgot his troubles, and hunted and fished, fenced, and played at games of skill with his brother in the courtyard, as if he had never known a sorrow. The mere living in such a splendid place as the house in the Ipswich market was a pleasure. For boys who were full of healthy life, and brimming over with energy, no better home could be imagined. The rooms were arranged round a fine courtyard, which was enriched with the same "pargetting" work as the front of the house. On one side of this yard, on the open space of a blank wall, some country artist had modelled a fat cherub in relief. The beauty of the work might be questioned; the solidity of it no one could deny. The cherub's nose had been a favourite target with Roger and Walter as children; but though they had shot at it hundreds of times, it remained as round and prominent as ever.

Another side of the yard, which ran parallel to a lane at right angles to the main street, afforded them still better pastime. Here was a recess roofed over by the upper storey, and in this recess, in wet weather or in fine, the boys might generally be found playing. Though the

house had only been built a hundred years it was already full of traditions. There were stories of money hidden here, of secret chambers there, of mystery and marvel everywhere. Yet, often as the boys had tried to test the truth of these tales, and to discover something themselves, they had never succeeded so much as in unloosing a bolt, or dislodging a single board.

In the noble wainscotted room that looked on to the small piece of garden ground in the rear, was a splendid chimney piece. Not many houses in the town could boast of such a fine example of rich carving. The family crest and coat of arms, the three red roses won at Hexham, were sculptured in the wood work, and just above was a curious, cube-shaped projection, behind which, according to one of the stories current in the household, money or some treasure was concealed. Between this room and the withdrawing room leading into the great hall were two large cupboards, formerly used by Mistress Margaret for storing her preserves, and the distilled waters and cordials she made from herbs and flowers. Of late years, however, she had ceased to keep such things here, because the cupboards, being built into the huge chimney which ran up between the two rooms, were apt to become overheated, and to spoil her condiments. Forthwith the boys had seized upon them, and rare hiding places they made. To this curious playground they annexed the wainscotted room which, in consequence of the sombreness of the oak carving, was seldom used by the family, and turned it into a passage for rushing from one cupboard to another.

During the course of a wrestling match, Roger had once accidentally flung Walter with considerable force against the wedge-like projection above the chimney. In the darkness in which this part of the room usually lay, neither of the boys had noticed this wedge before. Now, when it inflicted a pretty deep cut, they were led to examine it more closely. Much they wondered at it, and, recalling the family tradition, they tried, with all the strength of their active fingers, to move it, but in vain. They sounded the wall on either side till their

knuckles were sore, and speedily arrived at the conclusion that it was hollow, but all their efforts to displace the least fragment of carving were useless. Their father calling them at this moment, the subject of the chimney piece was dismissed.

For the time at least ; but the matter dwelt in Roger's tenacious memory, and one day, about a year before his journey to London, while harmony still reigned between him and Walter, he suddenly proposed that they should solve the mystery of the carved wedge. The brothers were alone in the wainscotted room, mending their fishing gear. Mistress Margaret was from home for the day, the servants were all busy in the kitchen, on the other side of the house. Roger, a grave, careworn man by this time, bearing his full share of the troubles and anxieties which distracted his unhappy country, proffered the suggestion more for the sake of the diversion to his own thoughts, than with any idea of making a discovery. Walter, delighted at the prospect of a fresh adventure, joyfully acquiesced.

Boys in those days had no toys or tools, except such as they could fashion for themselves. Walter and Roger had passed through youth without even a penknife ! Their sole weapon was a small dagger of rare Spanish workmanship, which had been given to Roger as a child, and had served them ever since for all manner of mysterious operations. Finding their fingers powerless to loosen the wood work, Walter fetched this dagger, and they managed, after various attempts, to insert it where the wedge was fitted into the chimney piece.

The wood yielded more easily than they had hoped, after the first. The wedge removed with infinite care, the young men saw within a small recess about a foot square. It was empty, absolutely empty. Not so much as a single gold coin, an ornament or jewel, or even a paper which might have been of consequence, could they discover. But as Roger swept his hand for the last time round the interior, to satisfy himself that the recess contained nothing, his fingers came with some force into contact with a projecting knob in the further corner.

Immediately a dull, whirring noise was heard, succeeded by a slow, creaking sound, as of a heavy door turning slowly on its hinges. This lasted for about two minutes, after which all was again still. The brothers held their breath, and looked at each other in amazement.

"Roger: what is it?" whispered Walter, timidly, who, in spite of his height and figure, was the weaker-nerved of the two.

"I know not, Walter, more than thou dost," answered Roger. "Something hath moved, that is certain. It may be that I touched a spring concealed in the hollow."

"But didst hear the noise?"

"Ay, I heard it," answered Roger. "'Twas the spring, doubtless, that set something in motion, and that something, whatever it be, it behoves us to discover. Come, Walter, bestir thyself. This mystery shall not remain unsolved."

Roger's face was flushed with excitement and pleasure. Here was a certain thing to be done, always a delightful sensation to a morbid man.

"I can see nought here which hath been moved," he said, going round the room, and carefully sounding the oaken wainscoting. "Test the spring again, Walter, while I stand and listen; we may haply discover from whence the sound comes."

But the spring had done its work, whatever it was. Nothing more was heard, though Walter, emulating his brother's courage, tried again and again to make it snap. Failing to obtain a further clue, the two brothers next consulted together, from which direction the whirring and creaking had come, each maintaining that it had originated in an opposite quarter.

"The mystery shall not baffle us," cried Roger, eagerly. "We will search both chambers. Not a cranny in this or the withdrawing room shall be unvisited. We will go thither next. Use thine eyes, Walter, and let nothing escape thee."

Now it had chanced that Mistress Margaret, needing something for her journey from one of the deep cupboards already mentioned, which filled the passage

between the two rooms, the door, which was usually kept fastened, had been left open. Passing to the other room, Roger's quick eye was caught by a black shadow within the cupboard, where he was accustomed to see a blank wall.

"Something is changed here," he exclaimed, flinging the door wide open. "This is not as it hath always been. Oh, Walter, see!"

"Brother, what is it?"

Walter, who was in the wainscotted room, still fumbling over the spring in the recess, hurried up, and peeped over Roger's shoulder. The young men, to their intense astonishment, looked down into the black mouth of a gap, about three feet square, in the oaken wainscoting of which the wall of the cupboard was formed. A small panel had, by some means, which they immediately connected with the spring in the recess, been displaced, and revealed, as far as they could see through so narrow an opening, a passage about 2 feet high. The two men stood staring open-eyed into the gap, and as the light was behind them, their own shadows made the darkness more profound. Walter was the first to speak.

"Roger, what can it be, this great black hole?" he whispered.

"Faith, brother, I know not yet," replied Roger, smiling at Walter's white face. A secret way of some sort, doubtless. 'Tis no hole, but a passage that thou seest, and whither it leads we will presently discover."

"Oh, Roger, nol Prithee adventure not thyself into it."

"Assuredly I must," replied Roger, "if we would hope to find the secret. Thou needst not to come."

"Nay, thou shalt not go alone," returned Walter.

"Good, then let us set forth. But first we must have a light. Stay thou here a moment, and I will fetch one."

Usually in all their adventures, which were mostly confined to hunting and fishing, Walter had been first and foremost; but now he stood leaning against the cupboard door, afraid seemingly to move a step alone. It was an unknown danger from which he shrank; but the mysterious character of the enterprise only seemed

to lend it the greater charm in Roger's eyes. He soon re-appeared, carrying a torch, tinder box, and flint, and was on the point of stepping into the passage when he again stopped.

"This road may lead us far," he said, "and peradventure, ere we return, the panel will be closed against us by some mischance. It were wiser to learn the secret of it before we venture ourselves. Do thou stand here, Walter, and watch, while I try the spring yonder."

"'Tis time wasted," answered Walter. "The spring doth not act. It failed when I handled it a while ago. Whatever the secret, it lieth not there."

"Nay, but we will try," said Roger, cheerfully. "The spring must needs have somewhat to do with it."

Mechanical contrivances in those days were neither common nor simple, but it was some time before the brothers were able to understand the cumbrous machinery. Although apparently separated by the width of a room and two doors, the recess and the cupboard were really contiguous, the communication between them passing through the chimney. It was necessary to push the panel forward, and as it closed with a click, the spring was fastened. A light pressure upon the knob in the recess was then sufficient to set it in motion again, and to make the panel slide back.

Armed with the torch, and closely followed by Walter, Roger crawled into the dark passage, the opening being only wide enough to admit a man on his knees. He found himself almost immediately at the top of a short flight of stairs. By the damp air which blew in their faces when they reached the bottom, the brothers knew at once that they were in a vault.

"This must needs be the crypt below the house," said Roger. "I have often heard that such a vault was dug out, when the foundations of the house were laid, and I have marvelled that there was no way to it. Now, Walter, look well, for surely there must be a path from hence."

The crypt was small and low, and had evidently been built only under the oldest part of the house. Apparently,

too, there was no egress except by the stairs down which the brothers had come. They were on the point of giving up the search in despair, when Walter's sharp eyes lighted upon a small door, so curiously hidden in the angle of the wall that he would never have seen it, had not the light of the torch gleamed for a moment upon the rusty iron fastenings. Close by, hanging within easy reach, was a huge key, and both key and door were so covered with cobwebs that Roger, after a hasty examination, declared that many years must have elapsed since the door was opened.

Both brothers set themselves strenuously to force the door, a doubly difficult manner, since it opened inwards. It needed their combined strength to make any impression, and as they could not tell how near the inhabited part of the house might be, they were compelled to be exceedingly cautious. While Roger was trying to thrust a bolt back with as little noise as possible, he was struck with the curious resemblance in the structure of the door to some other door he had seen, but where he could not remember. Probably in some disused portion of the house, which was as full of doors and passages as any old house could be. At this moment a truce was put to his speculations. The door yielded slowly at last, creaked on its hinges, and finally remained half-way open, disclosing a long dark passage, leading apparently into outer darkness.

Down this passage the brothers ventured themselves, without a moment's hesitation. An enterprising spirit had seized them both, and neither thought of turning back. But still Roger, always cautious, insisted on going slowly, lest a hasty movement should put out the torch, and threw the light as far before them as possible.

Ere long this strange underground journey became intensely wearisome. The passage seemed to extend before them as they walked. It proved of such interminable length that, had it not been for the solid masonry of which it was built, they would have doubted whether it were really an artificial excavation, or whether they

had not wandered into some natural tunnel, hollowed in the earth, which led no whither. Fortunately the passage was high enough to admit them standing, though they could not walk abreast in it. Their chief inconvenience was from the closeness of the air.

"Roger, I can go no further," said Walter at last. "I am like to be stifled here, and the passage hath no end. Prithee let us return with all speed, before we die in this dreadful place."

"Return!" answered Roger, with a little laugh, that echoed drearily through the vault. "Nay, Walter, be not so faint-hearted. Keep up thy courage like a man; 'tis only for a while. There must be some outlet, else wherefore was the passage built. Methinks this very moment I felt a breath of pure air upon my face."

The breath of fresh air must have been an innocent device of Roger's to animate his brother's drooping spirits. They walked at least another half a mile, as far as he could compute, Walter protesting and lamenting all the way, before a faint glimmer of light was visible. At the same instant the torch went out. Walter, who had not seen the light, fell forward, and clutched his brother by the arm.

"Forbear, Roger," he cried; "hast a mind to kill me outright? I tell thee, I can struggle no longer. My legs fail me, and now the torch is out, we cannot go on. Come back, ere it be too late."

"But there is the light," cried Roger, gaily. "Look at it, Walter. The danger is greater behind than before. Now or never, we must on."

A few minutes more of stumbling wearily along—for Roger, despite his cheerfulness, was almost as exhausted as Walter—brought them to the end of the passage. The light, which had been growing brighter at every step, suddenly flashed upon them with a brilliancy more vivid than day itself, through a small opening. Wonderful was the scene that met their eyes! Emerging from the darkness which had so long surrounded them, Roger could see nothing at first but a blaze of light, behind the pillar which partly concealed the opening. By and

bye he distinguished the soft shimmer of wax tapers, flowers, rich colours, and above them the graceful spring of Gothic arches. Already half suffocated by the close air of the passage, he was nearly choked by a whiff of strong, subtle fragrance, that was suddenly borne to him.

His senses, as well as his eyes, were dazzled for a moment. Then at last he saw clearly before him a small, brilliantly lighted chapel. The altar was hung with gold embroidery, and adorned with flowers and ornaments. An exquisitely chased crucifix hung above it, and the walls of the chancel were covered with pictures. In the body of the church were about a dozen men and women, some kneeling, some standing, but all absorbed in devotion. An acolyte in his white robes, swinging a censer, stood close to the brothers fortunately with his back to them; and a tonsured priest, splendidly robed, was kneeling on the steps of the altar. After a few moments he rose, murmured a few words and raised a golden chalice above his head. Immediately a little bell sounded, and the whole congregation fell on their knees. Roger Sparowe, the Puritan, had witnessed the Elevation of the Host in High Mass!

The silence which succeeded was so absolute that the faint click of the censer, and the stifled sobs of the kneeling women were distinctly audible. Then the priest began to chant in a monotonous undertone. He rose from his knees, bowed to the altar, and turning to the little congregation, raised his hands over them in the attitude of blessing. At the same moment his face, for the first time, came full into view. As the light from the tapers fell upon it, Roger leaned forward, curious to see what manner of man it was who dared to affront the law with the Popish idolatry of the Mass. The face was strangely familiar. He saw before him—that exemplary minister of the Word—Mr. Obadiah Sturges, of Ipswich!

Breathless with astonishment and horror, the young man staggered back into the passage, dragging his brother with him. This involuntary movement saved him from discovery. For at the first sight of the

priest's face, Roger could not forbear an exclamation which had attracted notice, and had he not shrunk back, his presence must have been detected.

"What ails thee, brother?" whispered Walter. "Thou hast surmounted the dangers of the passage—art afraid of this to which it has led? 'Tis the Catholic chapel at Alnesbourne," he continued. "Some pious ancestors of ours doubtless built this secret way to it from our house, in the old days when the Priory stood here."

"But the priest! the priest!" gasped Roger. "Didst see the priest?"

"Ay, I saw him, as thou didst," answered Walter, after a moment's pause. "What of him? Catholic chapels must be served by priests, I trow, as well as churches of our own religion. And a bold man he must be, to take his life in his hand, and say the Mass." "Then thou didst not see? 'Twas Master Sturges himself."

Walter burst into a mocking laugh, that echoed horribly through the vault. "Master Obadiah Sturges! Roger, I marvel that thou canst let thine eyes deceive thee thus. They were dazzled with the light. A chance resemblance hath misled thee. How could it be Master Obadiah?"

"It was Master Obadiah himself, and none other," protested Roger. "'Twas no chance resemblance, I would stake my life upon it."

This whispered conversation had passed between them, while Roger was busy with the laborious process of striking a light. They had gradually retreated into the passage, until the tapers of the chapel glimmered feebly in the distance. As Roger uttered the last words, the tinder flared up, and he caught sight of his brother's face, with a sinister expression on it he had never seen before. Walter turned hastily away, but it was too late.

"Walter, what means that look?" asked Roger, stopping abruptly in the narrow passage, and making the torch light play before him. "Dost thou know anything of this business?"

"Nought, brother," answered Walter, uneasily. "How should I know more than thou, since I have never seen this way nor the chapel before?"

"But Master Obadiah? On thine honour as a Sparowe, didst thou never hear of him before as a priest?"

There was silence. Walter tried to pass, and continue the journey, but Roger barred the way.

"And what if I did know?" he said, sullenly, at last. "Thou art so stern, so strict, Roger. Thou wilt have every one as fierce a fanatic as thyself."

"Thou didst know? Thou hast lied to me?" asked Roger, breathlessly.

"Herein thou canst not blame me," returned his brother, stubbornly. "The matter was no concern of mine. 'Twas told me under an oath of secrecy, which thou, of all men, wouldst not have me break."

"Thou hast no right to pledge thyself to conceal it."

"An I had spoken, wouldst thou or any other man have believed me?" asked Walter. "And wherefore should I speak, and betray a good man who trusted me?"

"A good man!" Roger shivered at the words. To him, as to all his fellow Puritans, every Papist was an incarnation of Antichrist; yet his own brother was taking the part of a man who, to the deadly sin of Popery, added the yet deadlier sin of deceit.

The journey back to the house was accomplished in silence. When they reached the wainscotted room, and all had been replaced as before, Roger turned to his brother. "Thou hast deceived me. I can never trust thee again," he said, slowly and sternly; and therewith he quitted the room, and the brothers did not meet again for days.

From that time, the dislike Roger had always felt for the Reverend Obadiah Sturges was increased to loathing. But he dared not openly accuse him. The story he had to tell was so improbable that, as Walter said, he could not hope to obtain credit for it, unless he made a full confession of the means by which he had obtained his knowledge. This would compel him to divulge a secret

which he and Walter seemed tacitly agreed to keep to themselves. Even Mistress Margaret was not told of the adventure, which argued, perhaps, more knowledge of her character than she would have given her sons credit for.

So Roger waited, and held his peace, though it was pain and grief to him. From that day forth a coolness sprang up between the brothers, which increased until it culminated in an open breach, the day of Walter's departure.

CHAPTER VI.

THE NINTH GABLE.

TIME hung heavily on Roger's hands after Walter had gone. He missed his brother more than he cared to confess, for Walter, though moody and silent with him, was almost as gay and cheerful a presence in the house as Mistress Margaret. With his horses and dogs, his hunting and fishing, and it must be confessed his bouts of drinking, he occupied a far larger space in the family than of right belonged to him. When the young squire, as he was called, was at home, he was always wanting someone to do something for him. In spite, however, of the constant attention he demanded, he was far more popular with the household than Roger, who gave trouble to no one, cared not what he ate, was abstemious in drink, and had almost given up hunting since the hurt to his foot.

But for a practical clear-sighted man like Roger there was always plenty of work. The invasion of the King of Scots had fallen at the worst time of the year. To take men from their homesteads in the middle of August, was to risk the loss of the fine harvest which now lay ripening in the fields. The Scots army could afford to make this inroad, the farmer folk complained. In their bleak, inhospitable climate the harvest could not be carried home for another month, but agriculture in England was sure to suffer. Nevertheless, so absolute was Cromwell's power over the hearts of his countrymen, and so fierce their hatred of the Stuarts, that the Iron-side soldiers, almost to a man, put away their sickles, took down sword and pike, kissed their wives and bairns, and went forth "to do battle for the Lord."

Those who stayed at home could not be accused of idleness. The task of governing a town, now divided

between the vestries and the central authorities, was in the seventeenth century undertaken by the gentlemen who lived in or near it. They looked upon it as their indefeasible right and duty, and accomplished an amazing amount of administrative work. The higher the rank, the heavier the responsibility. Far from being regarded as drudgery, the task of helping to govern his fellow-citizens was an honour from which no gentleman shrank. But the war had wrought such havoc among the natural leaders of the people, some of whom were dead, some in exile, and some forced to hide, that the work fell heavily on the few that remained. Of these, too, no small proportion were obliged, as members of the apparently illimitable Long Parliament, to spend half the year at Westminster.

Bailiffs, portmen, and chamberlains at Ipswich, had their hands full. Roger himself was already portman and justice, and was spoken of as likely to be elected bailiff shortly. He was never idle; and had hard work been a panacea for his cares and troubles, he would soon have made an end of them.

But everyone seemed to share his gloom. As August passed, the anxiety for news from the front became intense. In those days, when telegrams, newspapers, and war correspondents did not exist, the knowledge of events transpired slowly, often months after they had taken place. Villages and towns in the vicinity of the seat of war naturally heard the result of a battle immediately, and the news was usually carried, as quick as fugitives could carry it, to London. Garbled accounts circulated among the places on the line of march or retreat, but the bulk of the country towns remained for weeks in ignorance. Unless some man of note was fortunate enough to receive a news-letter, the contents of which were immediately communicated to all in the neighbourhood, the people in the rural districts had no chance of learning speedily the issue of a contest.

One afternoon, Roger, who had ridden out that morning to a village at some distance, to settle a dispute about a piece of land, and had been in the saddle since

daybreak, betook himself, by way of rest and refreshment of mind, to a book. As usual, the hospitalities of the house at the mid-day meal had been bountiful. Several of the Common Councilmen had partaken of, and had not failed to do justice to, Mistress Margaret's excellent cheer. There was not much drinking at the meal, but in accordance with the custom of the time, the guests adjourned, as soon as it was over, to a neighbouring tavern, there to drink themselves as drunk as they pleased.

Courtesy required their host to accompany them. But Roger, by temperament, early training, and religion, disliked such convivialities. His father's moderation had been a jest and a taunt with the older men in Ipswich, who got druuk, as a matter of course, every day of their lives. Among the town airs dainty Mistress Margaret brought with her from London, and which gave great offence to sturdy country folk, was reckoned a horror of drinking parties, where it was the fashion for women as well as men to appear. Her husband's rigid prohibition to abstain from them was not needed. On both sides, therefore, Roger inherited a love of temperance, almost unheard of in his days, and that made him the subject for much wonder, and many gibes among his friends.

Walter drank freely, like others. Considering the convivial tastes of the Royalists, the wonder would have been, if he had not indulged in deep and frequent potations. But even he was a constant rather than a hard drinker. Not more, perhaps, than once a week were the servants obliged to carry their young master to his bed, whereas his boon companions were seldom or never sober.

When other men drank, Roger, as now, occupied himself with a book. A country squire who read was almost as strange an anomaly as a country squire who did not drink. And Roger's studies did not wholly consist, as, according to his Puritan profession they should have done, of the Bible, and works of divinity. He knew his Shakespeare and Ben Johnson by heart, and

Spencer's "Fairie Queen," and the plays of the Elizabethan dramatists took the place of lighter literature.

His usual place of retirement was a noble room above the hall, with richly carved ceiling, and quaint oriel windows set in deep recesses. The walls were hung with portraits of the Sparowe ancestors, among which one or two fine Vandykes had recently been placed, and here and there an exquisite Italian master-piece. The picture gallery, or summer drawing-room, as it was also called, was over the entrance, and ran the whole length of the house. It was not often used, except for banquets, christenings, marriages, and other state occasions. The builder of the house had doubtless hoped that the Sparowe family would, in the course of a few generations, multiply so greatly that the room would be in constant requisition. Now the household had dwindled to Dame Margaret and her two sons, and the splendid banqueting hall was never entered, except by Roger, who had selected one of the deep bay windows as a place for his books. The great room was the coolest part of the house this sultry September day, and here he settled himself to enjoy his rare leisure.

His thoughts soon wandered from the book. Instead of the big, black letters, he saw a tender face framed in golden-brown hair, and a mouth that seemed to melt with sweetness. Of late, fancy had often played him this trick. He had grown indifferent to his books, and, when he seemed to be reading, was sometimes only plunged in pleasant meditation. Perhaps that was one reason why he betook himself so often to this secluded corner, where alone in the great house he was free from disturbance. Once at his books there was scarcely a servant in the house who, from sheer awe, would have ventured to interrupt the young master's studies.

One person, however was a privileged intruder. A brown, wizened face was presently put in at the door, and immediately after a little old woman in a maid's gown, with a wide white apron and snowy kerchief, walked into the room. Over her head she wore a second kerchief, covering the scanty grey hair which contrasted

strangely with her pretty pink cheeks. At first she looked about her in perplexity, not seeing Roger, who was hidden in the oriel.

"I am here, Joan. What would'st thou?" he asked at last.

She started at the sound of his voice. "Ah, thou art there, squire," she exclaimed, in a high, thin treble. "The fairies have not stolen thee yet, then, though I dreamt it yesternight. Dear, my master, I know not how to bear thee from my sight, since Master Walter hath gone to the war, some evil will light upon the house, and when I see thee not, my heart faileth me."

"Good Joan," said Roger, with a smile, "what evil dost thou think is like to befall us. Have we not had trouble enow. The day that my father died evil came upon us, enough to satisfy even thee."

"To satisfy me! Hear to the lad! 'Twould a' seem as though I desired thy hurt, I who would guard every hair of thy head."

"Nay, I say not so," answered Roger, "but thou art ever foreboding evil. Prithee, Joan, look more brightly upon the fortunes of our house."

Joan shook her head slowly. "Alas, poor lad!" she said. "Thou speakest of thy father, but know that by that same token they"—she glanced over her shoulder with a frightened look—"will work further mischief upon thee. Did I not dream three nights following, that I saw a corpse? and on the third day, was not thy father's corpse carried in by the same way that he went forth?"

"Joan," said Roger, gravely, "a truce to these idle tales, as thou art a God-fearing woman."

"Talk not to me of being a God-fearing woman, Master Roger. Idle tales, quotha! Why, thou didst not see as I did, that thy brother, when he went from hence, crossed the threshold with his left foot first. Doth that not bode evil, hey? And tho' I cried after him to return, and set it right, he would not heed me. Whereby I know full well that I shall never see my bonny boy again."

"Hast thou come hither," asked Roger, seeing it vain to reason with her, "only to pour out these lamentations to me? Methinks thou mightest have chosen a more convenient season, and not have thus disturbed me."

"I disturb thee, master!" she exclaimed, with a look of horror. "How canst thou say that of me? I am too much afeared of thee when thou art at thy books. Who knows if the writing of them be not of the devil?" Joan began to make the sign of the cross, then checked herself, remembering her Puritan principles. "'Twas the mistress I sought," she continued. "The yarn merchant hath come, and would have speech of her."

"Then why didst not say it before, and save me this long parley? Thou wilt find her upstairs; she hath been there an hour or more."

"In the loft?" said Joan, with a frightened air. "Alas, master thither I dare not adventure myself. Go thou for me, and beseech her to come; the man is in haste."

With a laugh at the old servant's many superstitions, Roger laid his book aside, opened a small door at the hither end of the room, and sprang lightly up the carved oaken stairs with which it communicated. The upper floor of the house consisted of one long loft or attic, the roof formed by the four front gables, and the windows set in the wall, above the oriels which presented so picturesque an appearance from without. It was scarcely a room, being merely the space left between the ceiling of the picture gallery below, and the actual roof of the house. There were hardly six yards of wall which were not broken by some oaken beam, recess, or jutting projection, and the ceiling varied in height from five feet to twelve.

Such as it was, with its fantastic nooks and corners, it seemed the very ideal of a play room. A better place for hide-and-seek was not to be found out of Arcadia. One might lie hidden there for days, Roger and Walter had often wistfully suggested to each other, as they eyed the loft from the street or the courtyard. The very sun, as it streamed in, now at one window, now at another, sported mischievously with the light and shadow

it threw into the room. But the sunshine was the only visitor; the long loft was forbidden ground to the Sparowe household. Boys were then, in practice as well as theory, in strict subjection to their parents, and when Robert Sparowe briefly enjoined upon his sons never to set foot in the upper floor of the Old House, they obeyed his command in silence, without attempting to discover the reason of it.

Naturally a sense of mystery, fostered no doubt by the strict secrecy the head of the house maintained concerning it, grew up around the room. The prohibition had of course ceased to exist long ago. As master of the house, there was nothing to prevent Roger from exploring every nook and cranny of it, had he so pleased. Dame Margaret was certainly not one to hinder him. But Roger held himself bound by his father's wishes, none the less when that father was no longer there to enforce them. He had no desire to penetrate the secret of the loft, if indeed there were any. His one attempt to solve the mystery of the house had resulted in so lamentable a discovery, that his love of adventure was quenched. During the six years which had elapsed since his father's death, he had perhaps not set foot a dozen times in the loft.

He was surprised, as he entered, at not seeing his mother. He called her name softly, half afraid of the sound of his own voice. Looking round him carefully, his eye was caught by a door at the further end, which he did not remember to have seen before. He made for it immediately, and found that it communicated with a small inner loft, built over the fourth gable of the house. At the first glance this loft appeared to be lighted by two windows, but closer examination showed that one was not a window, but a glazed door, set in the thickness of the wall. Opening it, Roger, to his astonishment, stepped out on to the wide leads over the projecting oriel windows below. It was a minute's work to follow this aerial pathway round two sides of the house. It terminated abruptly against one of the huge stacks of square, red-brick chimneys; and Roger, as he stood for

a moment looking down into the courtyard far below, and curiously examining the gables and chimneys from this novel point of view, could not help thinking how easy it might be to swing one's self down among them. For a man hiding for his life, no better place of concealment could be imagined than the loft with this absolutely unexpected mode of egress.

And now a curious thing happened. Straight across from where he was standing, running at right angles to the main block of buildings, which fronted the street, Roger's attention was attracted by a ninth gable. He had never seen, or at least had never noticed that gable before. Whether it were visible from another point, Roger, who habitually used his eyes no more than any other careless observer, could not say. Certain it is that the gable was new to him, and he at once began to try and connect it with some room in the house. But he could not account for it in any way, though he thought he knew the whole plan of the building by heart.

Pleasantly interested in his new discovery, he returned to the loft in a gayer mood than he had known for many days. His mother was there, though how she had entered the room in his absence, when he was positive it had been empty when he left, he was puzzled to know. In her hand she held a key, large and cumbersome as keys usually were. It was not attached to her housewife's bunch, and Roger, the moment he cast eyes on it, knew he had never seen that key before. She uttered a faint scream on seeing her son.

"Thou here, Roger?" she asked, hurriedly. "How hast thou dared to follow me? and whence comest thou now?"

"Prithee, mother mine, chide me not," he answered, gaily. "I did but follow thee to tell thee that the yarn merchant desires speech of thee?"

"What hast thou seen?" she asked, with a look of terror. "Ah, luckless boy; tell me where thou hast been?"

"On the roof," he replied. "I knew not till now that

there was a way round it. Nay, look not so fearful, mother. Thou canst see that no harm hath befallen me. My head is steady, and the pathway was broad."

Contrary to her usual habit, Mistress Margaret, without uttering a word, turned to lead the way downstairs, but Roger had no mind to leave this delightfully mysterious place without endeavouring to solve the enigma of the gable. He stopped as he passed a window which looked down into the courtyard below.

"One strange thing I saw up there, mother," he said—"a certain gable which I had not perceived before. Methought I knew every corner of our house, but this gable hath baffled me. Canst thou tell me over what room it stands?"

"I know nought of gables," answered Mistress Margaret, pettishly, as she moved to the door. "Come, Roger."

"Stay but a moment, and let me set my wits to work. Why, mother, there it stands, that self-same thing. Why didst thou not tell me?"

At his left hand, so near that he could almost have touched it, rose the gable which had puzzled Roger. But the sight of it only whetted his curiosity. For now that he was close to it, Roger felt certain that it corresponded to no part of the house that he knew of.

"Some room lieth hard by here, beneath that gable," he said, turning to his mother. "Canst thou not explain it? Surely the loft goeth no further than this wall, and yet, to see that gable . . . some building must be beneath it."

But to his astonishment, instead of answering him, Mistress Sparowe dropped the bunch of keys at her girdle, with which she was nervously toying, covered her face with her hands, and burst into tears.

"Mercy, Roger, mercy," she sobbed. "Thou art so cold and stern, like thy father, save that he was ever gentle with me. Look not at me with those cruel eyes. I have done no wrong."

"Wrong! Nay, mother, who held thee blameworthy?" answered Roger, much puzzled. "I sought but to know

the mystery of this gable, and straightway thou weapest, and dost accuse of cruelty."

"Thou art cruel to me," she cried, plaintively. "Thou dost suspect me, and sit on judgment on thy mother, as no son ought to do."

"I judge thee, mother? How, prithee, can that be? A thing here hath made me curious, and since thou canst tell me nought concerning it, it followeth that thou dost not thyself know all the secrets of the house."

"There is no secret, no mystery," sobbed Dame Margaret. "What wouldest thou know? Hast thou no compassion? Nay, I understand thee now. It pleaseth thee to see thy mother in tears—thus."

And to Roger's horror, who had a man's dislike of a scene, his mother sank down on her knees before him. In vain he raised and kissed her tenderly, assuring her that nothing could be further from his wish than to give her pain. At last, finding that all his efforts to comfort her were in vain, he determined to leave her to compose herself, and to investigate the mystery alone.

He had not far to seek. Just round the corner, beyond the angle from the projecting masonry in which the window where this little scene had taken place was set, he found a deep recess. Three steps, almost hidden by the shadow, led to it. Passing down them, he found his progress barred by a door, so cunningly contrived in the wall, that only the closest inspection and the clue given by the three steps showed that it was a door at all. It was locked and bolted, but there were no cobwebs over it, and Roger saw immediately, from the ease with which he could play the bolt, that it had been freshly slipped. Some one had passed through lately, and he instantly connected the door with the key he had seen in his mother's hand.

The next step was to persuade her to give it up. Mistress Margaret was still crying pitifully, and plaintively lamenting his cruel and undutiful conduct. But Roger was now so absolutely set upon discovery that the sight of her tears no longer affected him. His suspicions were roused. He began to perceive that here was

another mystery which had been concealed from him, and to which his mother was privy. He demanded the key of her in so peremptory a tone, that she resigned it at last, with a little shuddering scream, and Roger proceeded to unlock the door, which yielded easily. But as he flung it back, he was like to have fallen headlong, not perceiving for a moment that the flight of steps was continued to the floor of an inner room, some three feet below.

Roger found himself, apparently, in a small chapel. Or rather, as he saw, the moment he began to examine the structure more closely, in the roof of what had once been a chapel. On a rough calculation he judged that the space occupied by the building was from twenty to thirty feet long, and wide in proportion. The ceiling was so low that in many places he could touch it with his hand, and from floor to roof it was filled with exquisitely moulded arches. They were in the Gothic style, slightly pointed, and the interstices between were filled in with delicate open tracery. Nothing could be more beautiful than the graceful spring of these arches, but the effect was wholly spoiled by their close proximity. So thickly were they crowded one upon the other, that it was impossible from any point to command a complete view of the room.

These arches seemed to rise from the floor, but, to judge from the curve the described, they must originally have been continued to a considerable distance below it. Roger, in common with many country gentlemen, possessed a slight knowledge of architecture, and so soon as he began to examine the arches, it seemed to him that their structure dated back to an earlier time than the period assigned to the building of the house. When and by whom had this chapel been built? And how had it come to be imbedded in the house in such a manner, that its existence had never been suspected by the inmates? Upon this latter point Roger soon satisfied himself. To conceal the chapel a false flooring had been made, cutting it horizontally in two, and his mother's chamber immediately below had really been formed out of the body of the building.

There was a tiny window at the further end. Roger, resolved to inspect every part of the chapel, opened it with difficulty, and was surprised at the noble view it commanded. The river Orwell and the shipping in it were plainly visible, not a quarter of a mile distant. On the other side was the little village of Stoke, connected with the town by a bridge, and beyond, the flat sandy land stretched away to Harwich, then one of the most important seaport towns in the kingdom, through which the line of communication passed with Holland and the Low Countries.

But had the chapel been used of late years? Roger felt that this was a far more important question than the actual date of the building, and it troubled him to think how easily the door had yielded to him. As he turned away from the window his foot slipped upon some greasy substance, and stooping down he saw a spot of wax, which had evidently been dropped hot upon the floor, and hardened into a lump. Nothing else! Not a mark, not a shred, nothing but this blot of wax upon the floor, to show that anyone had disturbed the solemn silence of the chapel for years.

Roger went slowly back up the steps, cogitating the matter. He turned mechanically when he reached the top, and closed and locked the door. As he did so, he noticed a peculiarity in its structure, and the idea instantly struck him that he had seen the same before. Somewhere, in some forgotten corner of the house, this door had a counterpart. Roger went over the massive beams one by one, and all the cumbrous bolts and fastenings, as if they could help him to remember; when suddenly the recollection of Master Sturges, the secret passage, and the Catholic chapel at Alnesbourne came vividly back to him. Just such a door it was which Walter and he had with infinite difficulty unbolted in the crypt. Whoever had built the one had probably built the other, the crypt itself, as far as he could judge, lying immediately below the chapel. And intuitively, Roger, though he was not usually quick to decide a matter, leapt to the conclusion that Master Sturges, the

traitor in disguise, was somehow connected with the Popish chapel, which, to his horror, he had discovered beneath his own roof.

"Mother," he said, speaking more sternly than he had ever done before, "here is thy key. It hath done good service. And now tell me, if it please thee—and even if it do not please thee, for I am resolved to know—the mystery of this chapel."

The inevitable had come. Roger was in possession of the secret she had jealously striven to keep from him, and Mistress Margaret, still sobbing, dried her tears, and consented to make a full confession.

"Thou dost blame me, Roger," she said, plaintively, "for that which is none of my doing. Wherefore should I be called to account? I did not build the chapel. If thou must chide, prithee chide thy father's memory. 'Twas he who brought me hither, and trusted me with the key and the secret."

"No word of blame hath fallen from my lips," answered Roger. "I seek but to know of thee wherefore the secret was kept from me, the master of the house. Wherefore couldest thou not have shown me this key when the others, after mine honoured father's death, were given me. Is it seemly that a man should be in ignorance of that which is in his own house?"

"'Twas thy father's wish that none should know," faltered Mistress Margaret. "The secret belonged, he said, to the head of the Sparowes."

"Then by that same token it was thy duty, methinks, to tell me, mother."

"Thou shalt hear it now, the tale of it, an it please thee," she answered. "He hath often told it me. How that the Sparowes, being devout Catholics, did worship in this chapel, which they found here, and built the house round it. Until the persecution of the Papists arose, in the days of Queen Elizabeth, whereupon a room was cunningly contrived below, and the roof of the chapel shut off, that none might know it was there. And thou, too, wouldest never have found it out, hadst thou not seen the gable," she concluded, ruefully.

"Then the chapel hath not been used for nigh these eighty years?" asked Roger abruptly.

Mistress Margaret started. "Did I say so? Nay, how should I know ought thereof?"

"Thou knowest much, mother."

"Thy father trusted all to me," she answered, with a sob, "And thou wilt trust me in nothing. He showed me the door, and charged me that it should remain closed, for mischief and sorrow, he said, would befall us, if it were opened."

"But thou hast opened it," said Roger.

Mistress Sparowe looked piteously at her son. "I come not often here," she murmured. "Sometimes, when Walter will have it so."

"Walter!" cried Roger, sharply. "Walter, didst thou say? What hath Water to do with it? Hath he known this secret, which thou hast guarded so safely from me?"

"He is masterful," sighed Mistress Margaret. "He will never be content, when I say him no. He tormented me, until I told him."

Mistress Margaret was in sore perplexity. She hated sharp words and recrimination, and would fain not have had so much as a crumbled rose leaf to disturb her. And, behold! unkind Fate had cast her lot in the midst of such jarring interests, such fierce strife, that she was drawn helplessly into trouble after trouble. Roger's next words did not tend to comfort her.

"Oh, mother, mother!" he exclaimed, "wilt thou for ever use this secrecy with me? Shall that be always done behind my back, which none dare own to my face?"

"Now thou art angry with me," quoth Mistress Margaret, beginning to cry afresh, "and thou wilt chide me, and be stern, and thine eyes will reproach me, when thou knowest I cannot bear wrathful looks. Could I help it, when Walter was so instant with me for the key, that I gave it him perforce, only to be rid of him. I see not, even now, that I have done aught amiss."

"I chide thee not, mother. We will speak no more of it."

Roger turned slowly away, and went down stairs, leaving his mother standing alone in the great bare loft. Even to Mistress Margaret, who never insisted upon her parental rights, such an act, in those days of rigid deference, seemed greatly disrespectful. But Roger was in no mood for ceremony. His heart was sore within him. Her half petulant expostulations fell unheeded on his ear. Wherever he turned, he was met with falsehood and equivocation. A network of treachery had been woven round him. His love for his mother had blinded him hitherto to her faults. Now, he could no longer hide from himself that she had deceived him in this matter, as he feared she had deceived him in others.

But Roger had never the heart to blame his mother for long. Like his father before him, he made wide allowance for her. She could not help it, he said to himself. She was a woman, and therefore not to be held as fully responsible for her actions as a man. As usual, whenever he was tempted to be angry with her, he made Walter the scapegoat. It was he who had led their mother into wrong-doing, he, doubtless, who had sealed her lips, and forbidden her to speak of the secret chapel.

Since Walter went to the war, Roger had begun to feel more tenderly towards him. In his inmost heart he had relented, not because Walter's sin appeared the less heinous, but simply because he hungered for love and family union. Once more, his love was thrown back upon itself; once more his heart closed, and this time, as it seemed, for ever. This last evidence of deceit was too much. The proceedings in the Catholic chapel at Alnesbourne were as nothing as compared with the fact that he, Roger Sparowe, the Puritan, had a Popish chapel established in his own house, sanctioned by his own family. That blot of wax on the floor! Roger remembered, with a shudder, how the wax had dropped from the tapers on the altar at Alnesbourne.

Now also various strange circumstances came to his mind. Sometimes after Master Sturges, much to the

host's annoyance, had joined them at the mid-day meal, Roger recollected that Walter and the guest had betaken themselves upstairs for hours, to drink, as they said. Where they went had alway been a mystery to him, since he had never been able to find them in any of the usual sitting rooms. Beyond all question, they had spent their time in the chapel, and who could tell what had taken place? Far better, Roger bitterly reflected, had Walter half drunk himself to death on these occasions, than have allowed Master Obadiah to tamper with his spiritual convictions. Roger was not more illiberal than the rest of his countrymen, but Popery, to all the Puritans, was a very real and terrible thing. Even the discovery at Colchester did not weigh with Roger as much as that morsel of wax on the chapel floor.

So he sat and mused, and grieved over the conduct of the household committed to his charge, and humbled himself for his shortcomings. Then he took his Bible, and searched out all the texts he was accustomed to refer to Popery, and all which would bear application to himself, as a lax steward of his trust. Until, after an hour of this self-tormenting, he began to doubt whether, in truth, Walter or he were the greater sinner.

CHAPTER VII.

ALICE'S GARDEN.

THE harvest time wore away, News began slowly to circulate, in vague rumours at first, to which more authentic details were gradually added. In the second week in September, a few wounded soldiers from the army of the Commonwealth made their appearance in the town. They brought positive confirmation of the report that a great battle had been fought at Worcester, and the Royalists totally defeated. The army of the young King had dispersed. The Scottish forces were retreating in a body to the North, while the English Royalists, scattered and broken, were hunted down and taken prisoners by the victors.

The main bulk of the Puritan army still lay in the neighbourhood of Worcester, in spite of the pressing necessity that the country people should be at home, to gather in the harvest. It was not thought prudent to disband them until the last remnant of the Cavaliers had been crushed. According to some, the Lord General had determined to make an end of the Malignants, and to vindicate the authority of the Parliament. Others held that the authority of Parliament had long been only a cloak for the establishment of his own supremacy. At this moment he was all-powerful in England, the one clear-headed man among hundreds of waverers, and what he would do was a far more critical question than the fate of the defeated army.

All hope or all danger, according to the view taken of the campaign, being now at an end, the chief concern of almost every family in England was to learn the fate of individual soldiers. Although there was scarcely a household which was not directly interested in the issue of the struggle, the most agonizing uncertainty prevailed

for some time. No one could even say what had become of the young King. From the absence of all mention of him in the various reports, it was supposed at first that he had escaped, and that the Puritan army would not disband till he was captured. But the soldiers, as they dropped into the town by twos and threes, so positively asserted that he was killed, some even declaring that they had seen his dead body, that it came to be generally believed that he had met a soldier's fate on the field of battle.

Among the first to abandon all hope was Mistress Margaret. She had transferred to the young King she had never seen, her almost idolatrous devotion to the memory of his martyred father, a devotion only second to her love for Walter. Now, in the reaction from her over sanguine hopes, she fell into the deepest despair. Almost in one moment she made up her mind that her son and his master were both dead. She pathetically bewailed her sad fate in losing husband and son in the war, and it was vain to represent to her that Walter's death was not yet a certainty. When Roger tried to comfort her by suggesting that his brother was probably in hiding, otherwise tidings of him must have reached them by this time, she retorted with bitter words and reproaches. She told him that he desired the death of the King, which was undoubtedly true, since Roger, in common with most Puritans, thought the country would never be settled while he was alive. Then she cast in his teeth, that he wished for his brother's death too, and leapt, by a curious process in her own mind, to the conviction that because he wished it, Walter was sure to die.

As time went on, Roger himself grew terribly anxious. It was hard to believe that Walter, if he were alive, could not have found means to send them news of his safety. Each day that passed increased the agony of uncertainty. Roger sometimes felt as if he would give the whole world to look his brother once more in the face. Yet the difference between them was irreconcilable. His rigid nature, almost fantastically upright and

honourable, revolted from Walter's conduct, from his miserable entanglement at Colchester, and his deceit with Master Sturges. But nature was strong, and he often found himself yearning for the old love and boyish confidence, which could never be restored.

Roger Sparowe with his grave face, his measured speech, his careful self-control, was as hungry for love as any child. And this heart hunger had never been satisfied. Death had severed the bond which united him and his father; his mother and Walter feared him more than they loved him. Ralph Wentworth was away, dead perhaps by this time, and Roger had no other friend. There was something in the young Puritan's cold, quiet exterior, which repelled instead of attracting people. Roger was fully conscious of it, conscious too that no one had been at the pains to break the crust of reserve, and discover the warm deep heart beneath.

No one! Having come to this conclusion, Roger stepped out into the courtyard, looked up at the sky and the clouds, and suddenly determined, this very afternoon, to go to Mote End. An excellent excuse for the journey lay ready, besides the necessity of taking advantage of the fine summer weather to pay all needful visits at a distance. Tidings had come that Master Burroughs had received a news-letter from London; and Mistress Margaret herself had, for some days, been urgent with her son to go and hear the contents of it.

It was a brilliant afternoon in September that Roger stood, booted and spurred, waiting for his horse at the door of the great house. Like other reserved men, he seemed to have a kind of innate sympathy with animals and children, and all dumb and helpless creatures. He handled them easily, without any nervous timidity, and there was not a horse in the stable he could not control by his voice. The animal he was going to ride was a beautiful Spanish jennet, given him not long ago by a merchant to whom he had been able to render some service. Roger was not yet intimate with his new favourite. When he went to London, he had ridden a stout Flemish mare, kept for the heavy work of the

household, the Spanish horse not being strong enough for so long a journey. Yet, though she had only been a few weeks in his stables, the beautiful creature, when she was brought round, pawed the ground, pricked up her delicate ears, and curvetted with pleasure, as Roger took the reins, with a pat of the neck and a few kind words.

As he rode off, and looked back to wave farewell to his mother, whose usually bright face was clouded and disconsolate, Roger had an unwonted sense of pleasure and comfort. He was well mounted and well accoutred. The paces of his horse were perfect, his attire was trim, his grey riding suit of the finest cloth. His spurs, the pistols at his holster, without which no gentleman stirred abroad, and the trappings of his horse, all shone like silver. And to crown all, he was going to Mote End! For a moment he was absolutely elated. Then a sudden presentiment of disaster, such as had often disturbed him of late, seized him; and the rest of the journey was accomplished with his usual melancholy gravity.

The news-letter proved to contain very little intelligence Roger had not already heard. Naturally it dwelt chiefly on the great deliverance wrought at Worcester, and gave a tolerably accurate list of the Puritans who had fallen in the battle, but not a single Cavalier officer was mentioned by name. Roger's anxiety about his brother was in no ways lessened. It almost seemed as if he would be obliged to go up to London, or to the seat of war, to obtain certain information of his fate. Some hint of such a project transpired, as Master Burroughs and he carefully perused each paragraph of the news-letter.

"Do it not, my son," counselled the old Puritan. "'Twere a hazardous and a bootless journey to undertake. Neither can it profit you to go. Long ere this, your erring brother should have been to you as an heathen man and a publican. 'If thine hand or thy foot offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee.'"

"But Walter may be in trouble; he may need me," objected Roger.

"He hath sinned, not only against you, but against the Lord," continued Master Burroughs, disregarding the interruption. "Let him die in his sins; the time for repentance is past."

Perhaps Master Burroughs would not have delivered so stern a judgment had it touched a son of his own. He was always harsher in theory than in practice, but Walter Sparowe, in his careless way, had contrived to inspire him with a deadly aversion. Roger knew that argument was useless, and changing the conversation, inquired after the ladies.

"They are both within," answered his host. "Kezia is sick, and keepeth her chamber; the Lord restore her to health!"

"Amen!" said Roger, devoutly, but he could not repress a feeling of pleasure at the thought that he might by chance, have a few moments alone with Alice. "Of what nature is her sickness? She had it not when I came hither before."

"No, and 'tis but slight," answered Master Burroughs. "She over-heated herself a week since, and nought will serve but she must keep her chamber. She is but a weakly body, though the spirit is willing."

"And Mistress Alice?"

"Alice is in the buttery. Nay, hold, I saw her in the garden gathering herbs. She hath had more to do since Kezia's sickness, and hath bestirred herself bravely. This affliction hath been blessed to her. Methought she was over quiet before."

"But she hath not been ill," asked Roger, anxiously.

"I say not ill," answered Master Burroughs, stroking his beard, "but silent beyond the wont of a young maiden. I like it not. Women should be blythe and active, and wholly concerned in household work, like mine honoured mother—not pensive, and given to lonely musings."

The old man glanced up, as he spoke, at a picture above the hearth. Roger and he were sitting in the long hall, the common room of the family. It was not hung with ancestral portraits, like the rooms in the Old

House. The walls were chiefly adorned with hunting and military trophies, and over the door hung the sword Master Burroughs had worn at Marston Moor. But this painting evidently occupied the place of honour. It represented a stern Puritan dame, arrayed in draperies so sombre that it was only in certain lights they could be seen at all. To the ordinary observer nothing was visible but rigid, pale features, curiously like Kezia's, framed in a white, close-fitting cap, a huge ruff round the throat, and a pair of bony hands holding a Bible. The artist, however, had probably not done justice to his sitter. Something of human love and tenderness there must have been in the original, or Master Burroughs would never have bestowed such a look of affectionate admiration upon the portrait. But Roger, glancing up, was seized with misgiving, as if Kezia herself were watching him with those cold eyes, and suddenly determined that, now or never, while she was absent, he would put his hopes to the test.

"Master Burroughs," he asked, in a trembling voice, "might I crave a few moments private speech of you?"

Master Burroughs looked up with a smile. "Methought we had discoursed already touching various matters, my son," he answered; "but an you have somewhat further to say, say on."

But Roger seemed in no hurry to avail himself of the permission. He cleared his throat, fidgetted, and played with his collar bands, till Master Burroughs, growing impatient, took up a parchment and began to read. At this moment a serving man entered, and whispered a few words to the master of the house.

"Tell him I will not see him," said Master Burroughs, angrily. "I cannot help him. I know nought touching his bit of land. And I have company here, on business of importance."

"The man saith he will be brief, if your honour will see him," answered the servant. "He is a poor man, and hath been here before."

"I know it," said Master Burroughs, with a frown. "'Tis some poor wretch," he continued, turning to

Roger, "who tormenteth me concerning a bit of land he saith is wrongfully withheld from him."

"I would not detain you, sir" began Roger.

"Nay, my son, your business hath waited already. But an it could stay a while, and I saw this man, and made an end of him and his petition"

Roger rose, not without a feeling of relief at putting off the communication he had to make. "His need of you is more urgent than mine," he said. "I will wait, sir, in this room, if you will suffer me."

"Nay, you shall not lack for company. Alice is in the garden, and she will make shift, I doubt not, to entertain you till I am quit of the man. A thousand thanks for your patience, my son."

Roger did not look as if his patience were severely tested. He sprang up joyfully from the settle, then composed himself, and tried to walk demurely out of the room, as he caught a meaning smile from the servant, which sent the blood to his cheeks. Like most of the household retainers the man regarded the affairs of the family with almost as much interest as his own, and he seemed highly amused at Roger's eagerness, and Master Burroughs convenient ignorance of what was passing before his eyes.

Mistress Alice's garden had become a proverb in the country for beauty and sweetness. When the house had been built, not so long ago, for the Burroughs had only settled on the land within living memory, not a thought had been bestowed upon the laying out of the ground. It was left in its natural uncultivated state, and the grass was suffered to grow up to the threshold, and the great trees to obstruct the view, without let or hindrance. The inhabitants of Mote End were too practical, and the times too anxious, for anyone to care about mere beauty of appearance. Trouble was in the very air of England, long before the Civil War broke out; and when the struggle came it was idle, of course, to think of laying out as a garden to-day what might be in ruins to-morrow.

But when, some three or four years before, Alice grew

out of childhood, one of the few requests she made to her father was that he should give her a bit of this rough ground, to do as she would with it. It might be had for the asking, he told her with a grim laugh, as he granted her petition. Had he consulted his elder daughter, he would not have yielded so easily. When Kezia saw the use to which Alice intended to put her ground, she was struck with horror, and solemnly warned her not to follow the example of Cain, and make an offering to the Lord of the fruits of the ground. It was her own heart, still full of all manner of uncleanness, which needed the fostering care she, in a carnally-minded way, was bestowing on a plot of grass. Whereupon one of their rare altercations ensued between the sisters. Alice, always, was perfectly gentle, but she did not yield her point. She seldom did, when convinced that it was right. And, after citing the example of the great first father, who was set in the garden of Eden expressly to till it, and other Scripture precedents, she was allowed, at last, to continue her work.

Alice's next step was to press into the service a lad about the place, who had been her devoted slave, ever since she had nursed him through a dangerous illness. Then it was a pretty sight to see how she worked and planned and laboured. How she soiled her delicate white hands with the unmaidenly occupation of planting and pruning, and even sometimes would take a spade, and help the boy to dig. How she tended and cherished the flowers, as it was her nature to cherish everything, and made a special study of all their peculiarities. And how at last she was rewarded for all her pains, and the grateful earth began to smile, and the wilderness to blossom, literally, as the rose.

Alice loved roses, and it was one of her fancies to have them everywhere. Not the tender exotics of our day, which must be shaded, and watered, and coaxed into growing, and which, with all the care in the world, will scarcely yield a dozen blossoms in the year; but great noble bushes that, once planted, ran wild, and trailed

their lovely branches over half the garden. From June to October the rose trees were in full bloom, and Alice was even able to have a few flowers for her sick folks, from some of the hardier kinds, as late as Christmas.

The view from here was lovely. Alice had chosen a little plot of rising ground, which commanded the surrounding country. In the distance rose the town of Ipswich, with its stately churches, and picturesque gables, and red tiled roofs, which conveyed so quaint a sense of warmth and comfort.

But the distinguishing feature of the garden was its fragrance. Every wind that blew seemed to breathe sweetness into the flowers. Besides the roses, there were bushes of lavender, and clumps of sweetwilliams, and tall pinks and gillyflowers that scented the whole garden. Not a flower was admitted that had not some sweet perfume of its own.

Yet there was one bed where this rule had been infringed. Here were nothing but small, low plants and stunted bushes, with brown dusty-looking leaves, and no blossoms worthy of mention. They had neither beauty nor fragrance to recommend them, and yet Alice bestowed more pains and care on this bed than on any other. Truth to tell, it was chiefly for the sake of it, that she had begged the ground of her father. It was her herbarium, where she cultivated the medicinal plants and herbs which, with her own hands—like most ladies of the time—she made up into potions, and cordials, and cooling draughts.

At that time, in country districts, ladies were often the only doctors. The still room, as it was called—the place where waters were distilled, and the stock of household medicines prepared—was an important part of the house. At Mote End there was no physician within nearer reach than the doctor at Ipswich, whose fees were enormous, who was growing old and stout, and who absolutely refused to toil through the miry roads in winter. Thus it happened that the practice of the district—if we may use a modern expression—had fallen into Alice Burroughs' fair hands. Kezia's clear

head and practical common sense were often helpful, but she had no patience, and she could not, like Alice, bring her heart as well as her head to bear upon any difficult case. Mistress Alice's cures were renowned, and the country people maintained that there was no doctor to compare with her.

As Alice turned to greet her guest her hands, literally as well as metaphorically, dropped fragrance. This was the day set apart from time immemorial for the annual gathering of rose leaves and lavender, and sweet-smelling herbs, wherewith to perfume the stores of household linen. And although Kezia herself was laid aside by sickness, she had none the less insisted that the work should proceed as usual. Alice, therefore, had been gathering rose leaves and lavender since early morning, and dearly as she loved flowers, she was almost weary of her task.

"Good day to you, Mistress Alice," said Roger shading his eyes with his hand, as he advanced from the dark house into the glowing sunshine. "Your father hath permitted me to come hither and enjoy your company for awhile. He hath some business to dispatch. But I hinder you, may be."

"Nay, you hinder me not, Master Sparowe," returned Alice, blushing. "I do but fear my dull company may prove wearisome to you."

"Wearisome!" Roger looked up, hastily, then checking himself, he said: "I pray you, let me not delay you at your work."

"It will stay for a few minutes," said Alice. "I am somewhat weary of it, and much hath been done already. Even Kezia would say I had been diligent."

She plunged her shapely arms, bare to the elbow, into a great wooden tub of rose leaves that stood by, and let them drop lovingly through her fingers. Roger watched her with delight.

"Mistress Kezia herself is not more diligent than you," he said. "Never do I see you, Mistress Alice, but you are helpful to someone. Those rose leaves now—I trow they are for some poor body."

"Nay, they are to scent the linen. But when we have good store, wherefore withhold it from those who have nought. It maketh our own enjoyment the sweeter, albeit Kezia saith the gathering of rose leaves is partly vanity."

"That which you do cannot be vanity," protested Roger, earnestly. "All that you do is well done. 'Tis I alone, Mistress Alice, who am an unprofitable servant, cumbering the ground."

Alice looked up from the rose leaves. "We are all unprofitable servants. There is not one that doeth good," she said, gravely. "But, Master Sparowe—your pardon, if my words hurt you—is it not possible to think too much even of our own unprofitableness?"

"How can that be?" asked Roger, surprised. "Doth it not behove us all to keep ourselves in mind of our lost estate and wretchedness, and of the fear of hell, and of eternal perdition?"

"The fear of hell! ay, and likewise the hope of heaven. Sometimes, good Master Sparowe, methinks we forget our Father and think only of our Judge."

"I apprehend you not, Mistress Alice," answered Roger. "Is it not enjoined on us in our weekly exercises, and in the monthly fasts, to purify our souls by confession and repentance? Hath not the Parliament appointed days of national humiliation for our wickedness?"

Alice did not answer for a moment. The two were walking slowly down a garden path, and as they reached the bed where the medical herbs grew she stopped, and turned to Roger with a quiet smile.

"Master Sparowe," said she, "when I prepare my potions from these herbs, and carry them to our poor sick folk, I sit me down by their beds, and ask them first how they feel. Where lies the pain? Is their sickness assuaged by this remedy, or by that? Is the head hot or cool? And I bid them tell me all and count nothing too trifling. But when, by the Lord's mercy, they are raised up again, as happeneth oftentimes, then when I visit them, I ask them nought. I bid them straightway

forget their ailment, and having given thanks, to go on their way rejoicing."

Alice paused, but Roger did not interrupt her. He was puzzled, and waited for her to explain her meaning.

"I have often seen Master Sparowe," she continued, "that a healthy body doth not take cognizance of itself. Those who think much of their health, and how to preserve it, have assuredly some disease of mind or body. And so, methinks, is it oftentimes with our souls. We are given to much, it may be to overmuch, meditation on our sins. Should we not rather, being persuaded that we are the children of our Father in heaven, commit the keeping of our souls to Him?"

Alice had never before, in Roger's hearing, made so long a speech, and her vivid blushes showed the effort it cost her.

"Mistress Alice," he said, "an I could take comfort in your words, I were a happier man. It may be I trouble myself overmuch, but I have many cares and the right path is hard to choose."

"Fear can only blind us, and make the right harder to see," she answered gently. "And touching those same cares, Master Sparowe"—she glanced over her shoulder to see if they were alone, "I have somewhat I would fain say to you, if I may."

"Speak and fear not," cried Roger. "You are as a good physician to-day, who lays a wound bare, that he may apply a healing salve to it."

"Nay, I am no physician of the mind," said Alice, smiling a little to cover her embarrassment—"I know not if I dare . . . if you will not hold me to be forward and unmaidenly, and meddling in matters which concern me not."

"How were that possible?" Roger seized her hand, then catching a distressed look from her, he dropped it again, and the two paced slowly down the path for a few moments in silence.

"Peradventure I shall offend you," said Alice at last, "but my father and Kezia have so often spoken . . ."

"Mistress Kezia! Proceed, I beseech you."

"'Tis in the matter of your lady mother, and of her remaining with you," continued Alice. "My father and sister have dealt with you to send her from you, because of her leanings towards Prelacy, or to constrain her to change her religion."

"I cannot do it," said Roger, hoarsely, turning white to the lips. "Have they set you on likewise to urge me, Mistress Alice? Forbear, I pray you; here alone your words will avail nothing." He turned aside, and flung away a rose Alice had given him, crushed into a shapeless mass.

"No, no," cried Alice. "It is not so. None hath urged me. I speak of myself, and you misapprehend me. Your mother must not leave you. She hath the right to the first place in your heart, and in your home."

"You would not she should go?" asked Roger, breathlessly.

"Never. Mistress Margaret is soft and delicate, and 'twould kill her. An you could bear it, I could not—I that would fain comfort every living creature. But sometimes, when my father and Kezia are urgent with you, I fear lest you should be wrought to do it, hard as it may be."

"Mistress Alice," said Roger, his eyes moist with tears, "methinks you are an angel straight from heaven. I needed not your words, since I could never find it in my heart, but oh! to hear you say 'tis not my duty!"

"It is not what I say," interrupted Alice. "Doth not your own conscience speak? A mother! to be harsh with a mother! Ah, if I had a mother!"

The tears, which had lain near the surface all the time, dropped at last. Roger took her hand, and this time she did not withdraw it.

"We are so hard, all of us!" she murmured, softly. "We call not to mind that our God is a God of love, and the fruit of the spirit is gentleness. We forget oftentimes the simple law of charity to our neighbours."

"Mistress Alice," said Roger, as she wiped away her tears, "what is it hath moved you to-day? You have

comforted me so wondrously, I would fain see if I cannot bring you help. Tell me your grief, I pray you."

"It is nought, it is nought," she answered, hastily. "I am not worthy of the good opinion you have of me, Master Sparowe. Only—I would fain think as Kezia doth in all matters, and I cannot do it. Even she is not always right."

Alice's usual trouble had befallen her. She had been obliged to submit that morning to a sharper lecture than usual from Kezia, for sickness had not improved the elder sister's temper. The day before, Alice had ventured to remain at home, to nurse the dying child of one of the cottagers, instead of accompanying the rest of the household to the weekly exercise; and Kezia, being unable to go herself, had been all the more rigidly determined to send every other member of the family. Great was her wrath when she discovered the bad example Alice had set.

"'Tis well for me," said Roger, with a little smile, "that you think not like your sister, Mistress Alice, in all things. For she holdeth, as I well know, that I am still in the bond of iniquity; but you, I trow have softer thoughts of me."

"The Apostle Paul bids us be in love and charity with all men" . . . began Alice, and stopped, blushing crimson.

"But even he had a particular affection towards some," interrupted Roger. "Ah, Mistress Alice, if I could" . . .

"The master desires your honour's presence."

Roger turned and saw behind him the same serving man, who had already interrupted him in the dining hall. This time there was an unmistakeable grin on the man's face, and an amused look in his eyes that galled Roger exceedingly. Without doubt he had overheard some part of the conversation, how much Roger could not tell. The young man's cheeks tingled with shame, as he took leave of Alice with a stately bow, and followed the servant to the hall.

Master Burroughs was wholly unprepared for the

communication Roger nerved himself to make. He was comfortably rid of his importunate suitor, and when Roger entered, he was sitting in his huge, leathern armchair, rubbing his hands, and stroking his beard complacently. His curiosity was agreeably whetted to know what more Roger could have to say to him. No suspicion that Roger and Alice were otherwise than religiously concerned each for the spiritual welfare of the other had ever crossed his mind. Besides, Alice, though now grown to woman's estate, was still a child in his eyes. A mother would long ere this have divined the reason of the young man's frequent visits, and even Kezia had begun to wonder why he came so often. But fathers are usually the last to take cognizance of such delicate matters.

"Forbear, my son," he exclaimed at last. "Your many words bewilder me sorely. This matter hath come so suddenly upon me that I know not what to say thereto."

"Methought you would have seen" . . . faltered Roger.

"Seen? and what, I pray you? Hath my daughter, forsooth, so far forgotten herself as to give you tokens, meetings, and such like?"

"Nay, sir, none," answered Roger, frankly. "We have not seen each other, save in your presence. Until you bade me go to her in the garden a while since, I have never spoken to her alone."

"Truly I saw that you came here oftener than other of my friends," said the old man, after a pause, "and I rejoiced at it. I thought that you desired to be refreshed by the sight of our Christian walk and conversation."

"So was it, sir," replied Roger. "I have been greatly edified by the Christian exercises in this household, nevertheless your sweet daughter" . . .

"My sweet daughter!" retorted Master Burroughs. "Hath it come as far as that? Alice then hath shown herself unmaidenly and forward—hath encouraged you."

"Never!" exclaimed Roger, springing to his feet. "Think as you will of me, sir, but beware how you impute blame to her."

Master Nehemiah's face relaxed. He began to accustom himself to the extraordinary idea of a Puritan in love.

"How stands she affected to you, my son? Tell me truly."

"I know not," returned Roger, with a sigh. "She is kind and gracious to me, but so she is to all. How dare I take to myself a sweet word or look, when the same is bestowed upon the next beggar who asketh an alms?"

Master Burroughs walked to the window, and stood debating the matter with himself.

"Against you I have nought, Master Roger, save that the question hath been too suddenly brought forward. In an affair of such moment, much prayer and many searchings of heart are needed. I must seek counsel from the Lord. But—I am fain to tell you at once—I lighted this morning on the text: 'Can two walk together except they be agreed?' the which can have but one application. Doubtless 'twas sent me as a sign."

"I beseech you, sir," exclaimed Roger, hastily, "reject me not because of a chance opening of the Bible. We will be agreed, Mistress Alice and I; she can desire nought that I will not do."

"Young man," returned Master Burroughs, solemnly, "would you call in question the Scriptural custom of casting lots? You advance not your cause thereby. And as touching agreement, how can such be between you, when you would take my daughter to the house of that Popish woman, your mother?"

"My mother is no Papist. Oh, sir, beseech you, speak not of her! She hath done you no wrong. And if Alice—Mistress Alice, I would say" . . .

"Further more," continued Master Burroughs, "you are guilty of harbouring that rank Malignant and defamer of true religion, your brother Walter."

"My brother and I have quarrelled," answered Roger, turning crimson. "It needs not to speak of him. He, I trow, will scarce desire to cross my threshold again."

"And yet you would undertake a toilsome journey to London to have news of him," said the other, glancing sharply at Roger. "Ye be strange folk, ye Sparowes. For your mother's sake, say you. Well, be it so. Natheless," he continued, in a mollified tone, "since he will trouble us no more, and your mother perchance may be won over to forsake her evil ways, and your household be thereby purified,—it may be,—I must have time. I will consider more closely of the matter."

Master Burroughs stroked his short grey beard with a satisfied air. He had a strong dislike to innocent Mistress Margaret, considering her, with her dainty, extravagant ways and invincible attachment to the proscribed Church, a most blameworthy woman. But her prelatical tendencies could not blind him to the advantages of the proposed connection with her son. Strict Puritan as he was, Master Burroughs did not overlook the fact that Roger Sparowe was socially above him. A *parvenu* himself, he was inclined rather to overrate than depreciate the prestige of ancient birth and honourable lineage. And Roger Sparowe, though only a country squire, could boast of noble descent and broad lands, then the most precious of worldly possessions. The more he thought the matter over, the more feasible, nay desirable, did it appear.

Something of these favourable dispositions Master Nehemiah allowed Roger to see; and as he took his homeward way, the young man was not wholly in despair. For a time he had thrown off the burden of his cares and troubles. True, they all came thronging back upon him, as he rode down the long street that led to the heart of the town; but he was able to put a brave face upon them. There were two tangible sources of comfort. Mistress Alice had been kinder and sweeter than ever before; her father had not peremptorily rejected him. His conversation with Alice had not been exactly lovers' talk, but something far

higher and sweeter. Thinking it over, and recalling hungrily every look and every tone, hope revived within him. With Alice's help he did not doubt to overcome Master Burroughs' objection to Mistress Sparowe; and a home blest with the presence of mother and wife would be like heaven on earth.

Walter was the difficulty. He had declared that his brother should darken his threshold no more. But what if Walter were in trouble, and came and asked for shelter,—how could he turn him away? The thing was impossible.

What would become,—what had become of Walter?

CHAPTER VIII.

AN UNEXPECTED GUEST.

MISTRESS MARGARET stood watching her son with a smile, as he rode off down the street. A glow of motherly pride flushed her soft cheeks, as he turned the corner leading to the Cornhill, and looked back to wave farewell. Roger always appeared at his best on horseback, and to-day he was almost handsome. But his mother's smile was quickly followed by a sigh over both her sons, and Mistress Margaret stepped back into the great hall, where old Joan was mending a pile of household linen in a sunny corner. Joan's eyes had failed her of late, a grievous matter before the introduction of spectacles. Still, she stoutly maintained that she could see as well as a young girl, and to prove her words, she kept in her own hands the repair of the house linen, and often cobbled it woefully in the process.

"Busy, Joan, always busy," said Mistress Margaret, after watching her a few moments. "Dost never give those quick hands of thine any rest?"

"Never, Mistress," answered Joan. "Nimble fingers make a light heart. I think not so much on all the trouble that hath come, and that is for to come, when I sit a sewing."

Joan, in her homely way, was like a seventeenth century Cassandra; she was always predicting disaster.

"And wherefore should further trouble come upon us?" said Mistress Margaret. "Have we not had enough already, and to spare? Now that these sour-minded fanatics have turned Roger's head, they may surely be content."

"Have ye news of Master Walter?" asked Joan, sharply. "No, nor never will have. Did he not cross the threshold with his left foot first? And hath a man

ever been known to do such a thing, and not bring evil upon himself?"

In her present depressed state of mind, such dismal croakings were more than Mistress Sparowe could bear. Leaving Joan still muttering to herself, she went to the still room and buttery. Her operations were in full progress for preserving fruits and distilling strong waters from flowers and herbs. Mistress Margaret, town born and town bred, had never attained to the perfect house-keeping which distinguished her country neighbours; but her dainty ways, and desire to have everything about her of the best, made her bestow as much care on it as they did. To-day, however, in spite of her desire to test a new recipe for preserving apples, nothing went to her mind. In despair, she forsook her stew pans and pipkins, and determined to use the fine afternoon, and Roger's absence, to pay a visit to a friend. There was nothing, she thought, like a long confidential gossip, to relieve one's mind.

Half-an-hour after her departure a traveller, covered with mud and dust from head to foot, on a limping horse that seemed as if it would drop by the way, rode up to the great house. Two serving men lounged about the door, enjoying the fresh evening air, and to one of them the newcomer tossed his reins, as he wearily dismounted. His hat was slouched over his face, and his torn and dirty cloak wrapped so closely round him that the man, when questioned afterwards in the kitchen who this strange apparition might be, declared that he could not be sure if it were Master Walter or not. Joan had no such doubts. She had just folded a cloth of finest home-spun linen, and though her eyes ached sorely, she saw with delight that the darning stitches were as even and close as in her best days. As she was exulting in the thought that the napery would now last her young masters their life time, a sudden noise made her raise her head.

Before her, sound in body and limb, though haggard and worn like a man of double his years, stood Walter Sparowe. His leather jerkin was soiled, and stained, in

some places with blood; the delicate lace, which Joan herself had washed and starched for the journey, hung in shreds; while as for his wide boots, they were so coated with dust and dirt that Joan would take her Bible oath, she said afterwards, that they had never been cleaned since he went.

"Mercy on us, Master Walter!" she screamed, "is't you or your ghost? Oh, honey, look at your beautiful lace! and your coat, too, with the blood on't! The Saints—no, the Lord be praised, that you are back safe, though you went out left foot first. A plague on those lying proverbs. Ne'er will I believe one of them again."

And Joan, in the fulness of her ecstasy, flung herself into Walter's arms, and began to kiss the sleeve of his coat. Walter put her abruptly from him.

"My mother?" he asked, anxiously. "Where is my mother? And Roger? is he here?"

"The squire, say you? He hath gone for an airing to Mote End, I heard tell"—here Joan smiled archly. "But the mistress is not far to seek. She hath grieved for you night and day; she will be beside herself for joy when she sees you safe and well. I will fetch her in a trice; she hath but stepped round to her gossip's."

"Do it not!" exclaimed Walter, sternly, stepping between her and the door, when he found he could stop her torrent of words in no other way. "'Tis at thy peril, if thou stir from hence. I want neither mother nor brother, only to be left alone."

Poor Joan shrank back, appalled at such rough usage. For a moment she doubted whether it were really Walter, who had never spoken sharply to her in his life, or his wraith. He was white enough for a ghost, anyway; even Joan could not mistake the look of utter exhaustion in his eyes.

"Fool that I am!" she cried. "While I stand prating here, you are like to drop with hunger. Wait but one moment, honey, and I will bring you food."

"Thou shalt not go," cried Walter, arresting her a second time as she was hobbling off to the kitchen. "I

am neither hungry nor weary," he added, in a voice that belied his words. "Good Joan, I need nothing but to be left in peace. Come back to thy work," he continued, leading her to the chair from which she had just risen, "and sew for thy life. Stir not from thy seat, whatever betide and if thou see any one, say not that I am within."

Poor Joan, terrified out of her wits, and now firmly convinced that she had to deal not with Walter, but with an evil spirit in his shape, sat down and waited for what would happen next. So completely had the young man overawed her, that she dared not even, as she afterwards declared, turn her head for a moment, and therefore could only judge by the sound that he crossed the hall, and passed softly down the steps which led to the withdrawing room.

Walter Sparowe's first act, when he was out of ear-shot, was to lock and bolt the door behind him. By so doing, he cut off all communication between the entrance hall, and the family sitting rooms. To reach the upper floor from thence was now only possible by crossing the court-yard, and mounting a narrow flight of steps hard by the door of the huge kitchen. These steps led by a back way to the opposite side of the gallery with latticed windows, that ran round three sides of the house. Having secured the door, Walter passed to the inner wainscotted room, and without a moment's hesitation, drew a small dagger from his belt, and began to loosen the wedge-shaped projection, above the shield with the family arms, which was carved over the chimney piece. Partly from fatigue, and partly from agitation, his fingers trembled so much that the business took him far longer than need was, though he fumbled with the dagger, and an oath or two escaped him at his own clumsiness.

At length the inner recess was opened, and Walter immediately thrust his hand in, and snapped the spring. The same whirring sound was heard as before, but unaccompanied this time by any creaking. Care had evidently been taken, since the first discovery of the

passage, to oil the hinges of the panel, and not the least jarring noise betrayed the secret. Walter stayed a moment to replace the wedge, then hurried round to the cupboard. The door was open, fortunately. There was no necessity for him to force it with his dagger, as he was evidently prepared to do. Entering, he closed it after him, struck a light with a tinder box he carried, lit a piece of wood he found in a corner of the cupboard, and fixed it carefully immediately in front of the panel.

A long time now elapsed. Walter Sparowe crouched beside the passage, straining his ears for the least sound that broke the stillness. His handsome, usually irresolute face was drawn up with intense expectation, the moisture stood on his forehead, and his eyes had a look of feverish anxiety. His large, soft white hands, of which he had always been inordinately proud, were soiled and bruised, and trembling with nervous excitement. From time to time he put his head to the ground, and held his breath to hear, then raised himself again with a long gasping sigh. Once a sudden thought seemed to strike him. He sprang lightly up, and hurried off to close the latticed window that looked towards the garden, and to satisfy himself that the door between the two rooms, leading into the court-yard, was securely bolted. Then he came back, and took up his position again beside the opening.

At length he caught the sound of a feint thud, as if a door at a great distance were softly closed. Knowing what to listen for, he was next able to distinguish the muffled tread of feet. The cautious footfalls came nearer and nearer, and Walter, in spite of his anxiety, durst not thrust himself forward, lest he should shut out the light. He knelt down beside the panel, strung to such a pitch of eager expectation that he trembled from head to foot. Presently a low voice from within asked: "Who goes there?"

"A friend to Cæsar," answered Walter.

A man's head and shoulders now appeared through the opening. Walter gave the new comer his hand, and helped him to disengage himself from the narrow

passage. A perfect Hercules in build the fugitive seemed, as he crawled out, rose to his feet, and began to brush the dust from his jerkin and hose. As he raised his head, and tossed back his long, dark curls with an impatient gesture, he disclosed the stern, grave features, and keen eyes of Ralph Wentworth. Without a word he straightened himself, stretched his long limbs for a moment, then bent down to help another man who had followed him, and now crept, on hands and knees, out of the passage.

The new comer was younger than his companion, and slenderly made. He did not look more than twenty, and was rather under than above the ordinary height. His complexion, swarthy by nature, had become still darker through the dust, dirt, and soot which disfigured it. Out of this almost squalid face shone a pair of brilliant black eyes, full of life and spirit, though now heavy with fatigue. The young man's forehead was broad and well-shaped, but his mouth was wide, and his thin lips had a cynical expression. This strange individual wore his black hair closely cropped like a Puritan's, and this, coupled with his slight figure, made him look almost insignificant beside the two tall, splendidly built men, with their long curls, and rich Cavalier dress, who anxiously helped him to rise, and dusted the marks of the underground journey from his clothes.

His costume was as poverty-stricken as his appearance. He wore a dirty green doublet, and a pair of old breeches hanging far below the knee. The huge, wide boots, evidently much too large for him, had been cut and slashed to ease the wearer's feet. Neither cuffs nor collar relieved his wretched attire, which was completed by a high grey felt hat without a band, and stained, like his jerkin, with grease.

Not a word was spoken by any of the three men. Walter first satisfied himself that the two guests, who had arrived in this extraordinary fashion, were unhurt; then pressing his finger to his lips, he hastened to the wainscotted room, set the spring in motion, and in a few moments the sliding panel glided again into its place.

Having watched the closing of the aperture, and extinguished the light, his companions followed him, shutting all the doors carefully behind them. Although it was still warm, summer weather, a small log fire was burning on the hearth, and a welcome sight it seemed to both men. The younger traveller yawned, stretched his stiff limbs, and threw himself into an arm-chair Walter had pushed towards the fire. Wentworth, after rubbing his hands for a moment over the blaze, began to make a careful examination of the room, to guard against the danger of a surprise.

Meanwhile Walter bolted the door, and approaching the man by the fire with an air of great deference, dropped on one knee, took his hand, and kissed it respectfully.

"Nay, good sir," said the young man, raising himself wearily, "this is not wise, even among friends. I am but plain Will Somers, at your service. 'Tis I rather who am beholden to you for our deliverance. My thanks shall not be wanting when I am somewhat recovered from our lengthy journey through "Tartarus."

"The honour is sufficient" . . . began Walter.

"Faith, I was never better pleased than when our good Wentworth here espied your light," interrupted the other, a smile lighting up his tired face. "'Twas as welcome as land to a shipwrecked sailor."

Wentworth now came back from the other end of the room, and taking Walter aside, earnestly inquired if the garden was safe.

"Save for the maids, we are alone in the house for an hour or two," answered Walter. "By special favour of Providence or the Saints, my mother and brother are both from home."

Reassured on this point, Wentworth approached the fire, and joined in the conversation.

"I thought many a time our strength would fail," he said. "Thou hadst not prepared me, Walter, for the length of the way, nor the stifling heat of the vault. 'Twas your patience and courage, sir, alone, which brought us through. Nothing can shake your fortitude."

"I am used to it, Ralph, more used than thou, perchance," said the other, with a little laugh. "My head is in jeopardy, if I lose heart. How say you, Master Sparowe? If a man know that those dogs of Puritans are at his heels, and that his own skin will pay for it, think you not he is like to keep up his courage, and to adventure himself into the very jaws of hell?"

"Your Majesty" . . . began Walter again, diffidently.

"Majesty me not," returned his companion, good humouredly, leaning back in the arm chair, and stretching his feet towards the fire. "You do but mock at me, my friend. I am lord over nothing, not even over that which a man holdeth to be verily his own, his body, to wit. How many times, Ralph," he continued, with a droll twinkle in his eyes, "dost think I must hear the tale of mine own death and burial? How many times shall I be shown the very coat in the which I was killed?"

"You are pleased to jest, sir," said Wentworth, gravely, "but the peril wherein we stand is as great as ever, and precious time is passing. Thou hast brought us hither, Walter, upon promise of safety; tell me now, how and where dost thou propose to hide us?"

"Ralph Wentworth," said his fellow-refugee, solemnly, "there is a yet greater danger than any thou wottest of, the danger, namely, that this worthless body of mine will perish of hunger, whilst thou art casting about for some place of concealment for it. Good Master Walter, I am assailed at this moment by a most unkingly appetite for food, and I doubt not Wentworth hath the like, though he will not avow it. Is it possible, think you, in this house—to judge by this room, a right noble house—to have a morsel of bread and a draught of ale?"

It was noticeable that, utterly weary as both Walter and Ralph Wentworth were, neither of them offered to sit down. Wentworth held himself painfully erect, but Walter leant, exhausted, against the chimney as he answered, "I crave your pardon, my liege. The business of procuring entrance for you was so urgent, and I

feared so many difficulties, now happily overcome, that I bestowed no thought upon the food. 'Twas a hard gallop from Alnesbourne, to be here in time to open the way."

"True, most true, my friend; my necessities make me forget myself. Nevertheless this question of refreshment, though but a minor matter, hath also to my mind some degree of urgency."

"It shall be seen to on the instant, sir," said Wentworth. "Whom hast thou told, Walter?" he asked.

"None," answered Walter. "I had but time to come straight in hither from the road. None saw me but Joan, who sat in the great hall, and her I charged to remain at her needle, and not to stir hand or foot. She will sit there, good faithful soul, I doubt not, until such time as I give her leave to move."

"But peradventure thy mother may return?"

Walter shook his head with a faint smile. "I trow not," he said, "She is not wont to return soon, when she goeth to her gossips. I have known the business there to last till nightfall. Doubtless she hath much to unburden herself of, with all the tale of my evil deeds."

"And Roger?"

"My Puritan brother hath gone to Mote End, and ere this hath assuredly lost all count of time. Thou canst judge for thyself when he will be back."

"Jest not, Walter, touching so solemn a matter," said Wentworth, who was too anxious about the safety of his companion to bear the least approach to levity. "It seemeth then, from thy words," he continued, after a moment's reflection, "that we are safe from them for some hours, and may make our plans without fear of disturbance."

"Gentlemen," said the young man from the depths of the arm-chair, behind which this conversation was carried on, "lay what plans you please. Only I would warn you that you will soon have none to lay them for. A man who hath not had a dinner for three days is not worth saving. By my halidome, good

sirs, I, me seems, who have escaped by a miracle from the clutches of Sultan Oliver, must now strike my colours to King Hunger."

"Your pardon, my gracious liege," answered Wentworth, penitently, "I did but seek to know the present disposition of the family. Now Walter, lad, set thy wits to work. How canst thou convey to us food from the buttery without raising suspicion?"

"Through Joan," was Walter's reply. "'Tis an easy matter. I will bid her bring me food and drink for two friends of mine who have come hither."

"Hold!" exclaimed Wentworth, as Walter turned to give the order. "Joan, thou sayest, hast been all this while in the hall. She will marvel by what way thy friends have come, since she hath not seen them enter, and will gossip thereof with the maids. No, Walter, thy plan is bad. Devise another."

"Let me tell her boldly that I am seized with a raging hunger, that I have not tasted food or drink for days—which was not far from the truth—and swear that all the meat in the buttery will not satisfy me."

"Ay, man, well said," put in the hungry guest from the fire, "and then" . . .

"Then she will place the best in the house before me, and when I have dismissed her, I will bring that which she provides in hither."

"Do so, friend, and earn my lasting thanks. How now, Ralph," said the young man whom, eschewing all party epithets, we will call simply Charles Stuart, "what sayest thou? Art thou not thyself a prey to these pangs of hunger, though thou dost affect to make light of them? Thou likewise hast not broken thy fast since dawn."

"My liege," answered Wentworth, as he came back after bolting the door, "my concern for your welfare is so great, that I have no thought to bestow on myself. I know not whether I be tired or hungry. I know only that your Majesty is, for a few hours at most, in safety."

"Why, the devil take it, friend," returned Charles,

"a man hath but one life. And truly mine hath been so often jeopardized, the demise of the Crown, so to speak, hath been so frequently certified to by these lying Puritan knaves, that I doubt me at times whether I am verily in the flesh or no. This poor body of mine doth not deserve the care my friends bestow on it."

Wentworth was about to answer and to protest against the unprecedented view his royal master took of the matter. But at this moment there was a low knock at the door, and Walter, giving the pass word: "A friend to Cæsar," was immediately admitted. In one hand he carried a noble chine of beef on a wooden platter, in the other a jug of home-brewed ale. Under one arm was an enormous loaf of coarse, unsifted bread—very little white bread being used in those days, even in gentlemen's houses—while upon the other was hung a cloth of finest home-spun linen.

"Now, all the Saints be with thee, man!" cried Charles, starting joyfully from his seat. "Thou art the very harbinger of plenty. Fain would I dub thee, like my grandsire, a knight on the spot, for this loyal service of thine, did I not fear such an honour would bring thee to trouble."

And with his own royal hands which were so begrimed with dirt that nothing but their shape attested the kingly blood in them, he helped to relieve Walter of his burden. But when it came to spreading the table with Mistress Margaret's delicate napery, the vivid contrast between it, and the hands and faces of those who were about to use it, made them pause.

"There needed not this display of luxury, my friend," said Charles, with a smile. "My last meal was eaten on the floor, out of an earthen pipkin."

"Methought, since it pleased your Majesty to grace our humble table," answered Walter, "that 'twas well to bring it."

Charles shrugged his shoulders. "Then since it is so, we must suit ourselves to our circumstances," he answered. "How now, Ralph? Is it safe to wash off some part of the soil of our journey? Are we here in

such security that I may rejoice in the comfort of a clean skin?"

Wentworth hesitated a moment, as if the dirt were actually too necessary a part of his master's disguise to be lightly discarded. Receiving an assurance from Walter that, so far, they were alone in the house, he consented to go into the next room, Charles casting an affectionate glance as they passed, upon the chine of beef. Here, without bestowing a thought upon his own travel-stained condition, Wentworth knelt down, and drew off his master's boots, while Walter flitted between the two rooms, laying the meal in rough, soldier-like fashion, and listening anxiously from time to time at the door which led to the hall.

When the two travellers reappeared, both several shades fairer of complexion, Charles eagerly attacked the huge joint. So intent was he on satisfying his hunger, that he did not discover for some time that his two companions had neither of them joined him. Looking up then, he perceived that Wentworth and Walter were standing on either side of him in respectful silence. Such a stretch of deference Charles would by no means permit, but it was not till he had commanded them on their allegiance, that the two consented to sit down, and eat at the same table. In spite, however, of his anxiety, and of his protestations that he needed nothing, Wentworth did ample justice to the meal, and Walter seconded him vigorously. Their hunger allayed, they began to hold counsel concerning the next step to be taken in the present juncture.

"You have then your mother with you, Master Sparowe," said Charles. "Is she favourably affected towards us?"

"She is devoted, heart and soul, to your Majesty's cause," answered Walter, fervently.

"Ay, that is well. Nevertheless I rejoice that she is from home to-day. In sooth, I care not to present myself before any lady in this guise."

"But she will return anon, and Roger likewise," said

Wentworth, impatiently. "Both will be here ere we can lay any plans of concealment."

Walter shifted uneasily in his chair at the mention of his brother's name. "Dost thou know, Ralph," he asked in a low voice, "that he hath forbid me to come hither?"

"Nay, then are we worse bested than ever," rejoined Wentworth. "I pray you, sir, let us now consider what we will do next, and to whom we may entrust the secret of your presence."

"I understand you not," answered Charles, looking in perplexity from one to the other. "Who is this Roger of whom you speak? Is not our friend here master of this house?"

"Would that I were, my liege!" exclaimed Walter, earnestly, "This poor dwelling, and all that it contains, were then most heartily at your disposal. Alas! the master here is this same brother of mine, Roger Sparowe."

"And is he one of us?"

"No, forsooth, but a sour-minded Puritan, who hath never a good word for any man who holdeth not with him. And, truth to tell, for some slight difference of opinion betwixt us, a trifling matter whereat none but he had taken offence. he turned me from the house, before I joined the good cause at Worcester. He will assuredly not be well pleased to see me again."

Charles listened attentively to Walter's explanation, then, to the dismay of his companions, flung himself back in his chair, and gave vent to a hearty laugh.

"And so it seems that thou, Ralph, the cautious, the prudent, to whom my lord Wilmot did so solemnly entrust me—that thou hast brought me to the house of a Puritan fanatic. Into those very jaws of death, from which I sought to escape, hast thou now led me. By my faith, I would not give a straw for the safety of mine own neck, when this same cross-grained fanatic discovereth my presence."

"Beseech your Majesty not to jest in so vital a matter," replied Wentworth, much distressed. "Hear me, I pray you."

"Well, man, what hast thou to say for thyself?" returned Charles, still amused. "How wilt thou justify this venture of thine? Oh, if Wilmot could but see me now, in the very house of a Puritan!"

"Firstly, my liege," answered Wentworth, "that I was driven to do it. By no other than the secret way could we have left Alnesbourne, the soldiers were so close upon us. And Roger Sparowe, though he be, alas! a Puritan, is likewise my own dear friend. I have known him, and trusted him, since we were boys together. He is a gentleman of stainless birth and honour, who would scorn to yield up a fugitive who sought shelter with him. Walter, thy difference with thy brother hath blinded thee to the nobleness of his nature, else thou couldest not speak so harshly of him."

"Is this so?" asked Charles. "Is thy friend verily such an one as thou holdest him to be?"

"I would stake mine own honour upon his," answered Wentworth emphatically. "We have been friends for many years, my liege. Never hath Roger Sparowe failed any man that trusted in him."

"If it be as thou sayest, Ralph" . . . began Charles, after a moment's pause, with a twinkle in his eye.

"It is so of a truth, sir."

"This noble-minded Puritan gentleman, then, is like to be sore exercised in his mind, when he finds to what purpose we have used his house. It is his desire to stamp out the Malignants, root and branch. What, think you, will he do and say when he hath the very chief of them in his hands?"

Walter did not speak, but Wentworth answered firmly: "He will do his duty, my liege, and that right honourably."

"The saints forbid!" returned Charles, with a laugh. "His duty, forsooth! His duty, good Ralph, were to deliver me up to the nearest justice of the peace, and win a thousand pounds thereby. Ay, you may flinch, Master Walter, but so it is. Faith, I was never worth so much before."

"I will run him through the body myself, ere he do

so dastardly a deed," cried Walter. "Hear me, sir. There needs not that he should know ought of the matter. Thou hast come hither, Ralph, to claim help of him, and hast brought with thee thy serving man—I crave your Majesty's pardon that I speak thus of you. Nought can be simpler than the tale we have to tell, and Roger, who is guileless enough, as I well know, will suspect nothing."

"He will suspect everything," replied Wentworth. "He will not believe it for a moment. He is no fool, is thy brother Roger. Thinkest thou his keen eyes will not instantly perceive that my serving groom is no common man? And his suspicions once set a'foot, he will never rest till he hath discovered all."

"Then i' God's name, let him discover all," said Charles. "For my part, I am weary of all this concealment. An he be the man thou sayest, Ralph, he will at least be silent, though he cannot look on me with favour. I thank you both for your care of me, but herein I only will act. Myself will tell him the whole truth, as soon as he doth begin to suspect."

On the whole, after mature deliberation, the boldest seemed also the wisest course. It was agreed that Charles should pass for the character he had assumed, Will Somers, a groom in waiting upon the Cavalier, Ralph Wentworth, who had contrived to escape with his master from Worcester. The deception should be carefully kept up with the household, but as soon as Roger showed signs of incredulity, the whole secret should be frankly divulged to him. Walter yielded the more readily to the better judgment of his friends, because he himself began to doubt the possibility of blinding Roger much longer in this, or in other matters.

But he strenuously resisted the proposal that the mystery should be revealed to his mother, ardent Royalist though she was. Her very zeal would betray them, he said. She would not be content, as they were, to treat the king before strangers with well-bred indifference, and would sooner risk the safety of them all than show herself, or allow others to show, the least

disrespect towards him. She need scarcely see or hear of so insignificant a person as Will Somers. Walter promised soon to make her forget his very existence; and he undertook so to work upon her fears for his own and Wentworth's safety, that he doubted not to bind her to silence.

There was still the difficult question how far Joan should be trusted with the important secret. She had such free and constant access at all hours to every part of the house, that Walter thought it would be impossible to keep her wholly in ignorance. It was determined, therefore, to take her to a certain extent into confidence, leaving it to the future to determine how far that confidence should be extended.

Matters being thus settled, as satisfactorily as possible under the circumstances, Walter took his two guests to their place of concealment—the loft Roger had explored with so much astonishment a few days before. Walter showed himself perfectly acquainted with every corner of the strange, rambling old attic. He pointed out the passage over the leads, and explained where it ended, though he dared not take the fugitives along it in broad daylight, for fear of being seen from the street. Unlocking the door that led to the chapel, he showed them the tiny window, and the noble view from it over the river Orwell.

Finally, Walter brought his guests to the most secret recess in the house, a hiding place known probably only to himself, and on the strength of which he had ventured to incur the terrible risk of receiving his royal master. Part of the loft was covered only by the roof of the house, which ran up into gables, with all the rafters and cross beams showing. Over another part the ceiling was flat and low, though so broken was the outline of walls and roof everywhere, that the difference in height was scarcely perceptible. Here, set in the thickness of one of the gables, to be reached only by a ladder, was a tiny chamber, not more than six feet square, where anyone, provided he had food, might lie securely hidden for days and weeks. A sliding panel closed this room

from below, and when it was fastened, it was impossible, without knowing the exact spot, to find it again.

Having made the fugitives thoroughly acquainted with this place of safe retreat in case of danger, Walter left them in the attic, until a room could be prepared for them. Before him lay a task as difficult as any he had yet attempted—to break to his mother and Roger, as far as he dared, the news of the arrival of these strange and unwelcome visitors.

CHAPTER IX.

RECOGNITION.

THE Fates were certainly propitious to Walter Sparowe and his companions this brilliant September evening. For Mistress Margaret's journeys from home were few, and such an event as an afternoon comfortably devoted to gossip had not fallen for months. Roger disapproved of these visits to Gossip Thurton's, and his mother rarely ventured upon them except when he was away. In the present instance Walter had rightly judged her. So long did she stay with her friends, talking over matters which, in a household composed wholly of men, she had no opportunity of discussing, that she was appalled, on coming forth at last, cloaked and hooded for her homeward journey, to find that the sun had set, and night was upon her.

Now a night walk in those days, if there was no moon, was a very different matter from a night walk at the present time. To say nothing of the danger from out-throats and robbers, who infested the outskirts of all the larger towns, the streets themselves were neither safe nor pleasant. There were no well defined footways to shield the pedestrians from passing carriages, and the rough stones with which the high road was paved were usually ankle deep in mud. The streets were so narrow that a huge travelling coach, with its team of six or eight horses, might at any moment drive the passers by to take refuge for safety in one of the corners, angles, or covered gateways which abounded in all the picturesque old towns. Added to which, the darkness, even in the principal thoroughfares of a town, was such as we can form no idea of, except in a country lane in mid winter. It is true that, by Act of Parliament, all houses of the better class were compelled to hang out a lantern at night, but this law was never rigidly enforced, even in

London, and habitually evaded in the country. Besides, as it was only in operation from All Hallows to Candlemas, it was of no use to wayfarers on a dark night in early autumn. And even where common charity led a householder to put a lamp before his door, the feeble light it gave only made darkness more visible.

Under cover of the night, too, the streets were made the receptacle of the filth which had accumulated in the houses during the day. There were no other sewers; and woe to the unwary passer by, on whom some zealous housewife unwittingly emptied her pail of refuse.

Under the circumstances it is not surprising that no lady stirred abroad after dark, unless well guarded by footmen with torches. Mistress Margaret, however, not intending to stay late, had given no orders for her homeward escort, and she was standing at the door of Gossip Thurton's house, ruefully looking out into the darkness, and lamenting her plight, when a man on horseback paused at the sound of her voice, turned, and to her joy she beheld Roger.

Here, too, some lucky chance had favoured Walter. Roger also was returning later than he intended, for he was not often from home after dark. He had left Mote End long before sunset, but as he rode into the town, he met a friend, one of the Common Councilmen. This gentleman was anxious to consult young Master Sparowe, whose practical sense and clear head for business were justly valued by the borough authorities, upon some matter connected with the shipping by the riverside. There was still an hour of daylight, and the worthy man proposed that, since there was no time like the present, they should go at once, and examine the land in question. The dispute turned upon the point whether a certain piece of ground, lying alongside the Orwell, were within the town boundaries, and whether the Corporation could claim the port dues upon all goods landed there. Roger Sparowe listened, put a few questions, surveyed the land, and promised to look over certain papers he had by him at home, which might, he thought, throw some light upon the subject.

In this way it happened that Roger, instead of jogging along the fairly kept high road from London, was picking his way painfully through one of the narrow bye-streets leading from the river, at the same moment that Mistress Margaret, standing at Gossip Thurton's door, was wondering how, on so dark a night, she should ever reach home. To dismount was the work of a moment. Since his mother could not ride behind him, Roger walked beside her, his horse's rein over his arm. Such a conclusion to the journey caused no small perturbation to the Spanish jennet. By neighing and pawing, and pushing her slender nose into his hand, she tried to convey to her master that this slow walk, when the stables were almost within sight, was a sore trial to a horse's feelings. Roger smiled at her impatience, and now and then he broke off his talk with Mistress Sparowe, to bestow a playful caress or a kind word upon her.

The conversation was easier and more cheerful than usual. The afternoon's journey had done good to both mother and son. Mistress Margaret was happier than she had been for weeks. She had been able to unburden her mind of a great many things, which were robbed of half their importance merely by being put into words. Roger, too, was strangely and unaccountably light-hearted. For a time he had absolutely forgotten Walter, and talked, and laid plans, as easily as if there were no terrible anxiety pressing upon him. It was with a sudden pang that he caught sight of Joan, standing at the door of the great house, a torch in her hands, evidently on the watch to impart some important piece of news. And it was with mixed feelings of anger and relief that he listened to her joyful report, somewhat indiscreetly proclaimed before they had crossed the threshold, that the wanderer had returned in safety.

"As hale and hearty, Mistress, i' faith, as if he had never gone out wrong foot first. I know not what to make of 't. He ails nothing, I'll take my oath on't. I thought 'twas his wraith at first, but now he hath eaten such a meal since he came, ay, such a meal as 'ud last me half the week. I'll warrant my poor boy hath had

nought pass his lips for days, may be. Them Puritan folk," she continued, with a cautious glance at Roger, "were like to have starved him to death."

Joan was almost equally divided between her delight at Walter's return, and her vexation at the failure of her prophecy. Roger did not much concern himself about her view of the matter. He was seized with a sudden dread, lest he should be confronted with Walter before he had made up his mind how to treat him. Making the excuse that he wished himself to see to the mare's comfort, he took the reins, and led her off down the lane by the side of the house, into which the stables opened. Mistress Margaret turned to Joan.

"And why comes my son not to me?" she asked, impatiently. "Since he hath returned whole and sound, he should be here. Hath he forgotten how his mother longs to see him?"

"Hist, Mistress," said Joan, with her finger to her lips, drawing Dame Margaret into the house. "Soft—I had forgotten—we must be secret—we must not speak openly. Master Walter hath told me that it is death to him if I talk of it. He dare not come forth, he saith; he must be in hiding. He is in the wainscotted room."

Mistress Margaret hurried off, full of joyful eagerness to welcome her son, but a little frightened at Joan's last words. Her fears were increased at the sight of Walter. His worn face, hollow cheeks, and sunken eyes, with great black lines beneath them, startled and alarmed her. He seemed even to have grown thinner, so at least she declared, for his clothes sat loosely on him. His mouth twitched incessantly, and his hands were never still for a moment. Three weeks ago he had left her, a gay, light-hearted boy, going gleefully to make his first trial of arms; and here she beheld a grave, care-stricken man, looking years older even than her staid Roger. Time was when, let what would happen, Walter's easy composure was never disturbed. Now he started at every sound, and his eyes were constantly fixed on the door.

"Thou art ill, my son," she said, anxiously, as, after the first greeting, Walter closed the door she had left

open, and flung himself wearily into a chair. "Joan saith thou art hale and sound, but she is wrong. Thou art not the same. Tell me what ails thee. Is it some wound thou wilt not speak of?"

"None, mother. Look not so fearfully at me; I have not won so much as a scratch. I am weary, not ill. A man who hath known no better bed than a truss of straw for twelve nights is fain to be weary."

"No bed, Walter!" cried Mistress Margaret, in horror. "Those cruel Parliament men! Would they not let thee sleep? Not for twelve nights, didst say? Then not another word will I hear. Come straightway to thy chamber, and get thee to bed, and rest thee there undisturbed till to-morrow night, if thou wilt."

Walter looked down at his mother, and a softer expression came into his eyes. "That were too hard for thee, mother mine, for I trow thou art bursting with a thousand questions. There are other things more needful than rest and sleep. Didst not say that Roger was with thee. Doth he know that I am come?"

"Ay, Joan hath told him," said Dame Margaret, carelessly. "He will be here anon; he hath but gone to see to the new Spanish mare. How now, Walter? Thou wast pale before, but now thou art whiter than this kerchief. Is it the mention of thy brother's name that hath so troubled thee? Foolish boy! as though he would not be as glad to see thee as I am."

"Mother, I know not," answered Walter, shuddering. "I was not welcome before" . . .

"Some boyish quarrel, which Roger will be first to forget and forgive," interrupted Mistress Margaret. "He is happy to-day, in gayer mood than I have seen him for a long while. How canst thou think such hard things of him, Walter?"

"Thou dost forget, Mother. I have no right to be here, nor anywhere else. The Parliament dogs are at my heels. If Roger receive me, he giveth shelter to a man on whose head a price hath been set. Perchance 'twill bring himself into jeopardy. For, oh! the good cause is lost—lost!"

And for a moment Walter's head fell forward on the table, and a long shivering sigh escaped him. Then he clenched his hand, and raised himself with an effort, muttering: "Fool that I am! This weakness shall not be. There are others to consider."

Mistress Margaret sat and gazed at him, horror struck. Till now she had not realized the significance of the defeat at Worcester. She had only a vague, blurred notion that the cause of one son had been lost, the cause of the other won; the meaning of it had not come home to her. She did not know how to comfort Walter. She could only look helplessly at him, and take his hand softly between her own, and press it.

At this moment the door opened, and Roger entered. He came in quietly, moving with great deliberation, as if he were not dreading this inevitable meeting as much as Walter. A hard task lay before him. Three weeks ago, he had driven Walter to leave the house, and held himself fully justified in so doing; now, his brother came back under such circumstances, that to refuse to admit him was to consign him to almost certain death. Roger knew well that all who had fought at Worcester were marked men, for the Parliament had determined to show no mercy to those Malignants who had a third time involved the unhappy country in civil war. He knew that his own interest with the victorious party would be taxed to the uttermost to shield Walter; that to give his brother shelter would probably damage his good reputation, and would certainly imperil the hopes he had indulged in only a few hours before. All these thoughts surged through poor Roger's brain, as he drew himself up, and walked across the room with as much composure as he could affect.

As Roger came towards him, Walter dragged himself wearily up from his chair and stood leaning against the table. For a moment there was silence, each brother striving to read the other's thoughts in his face. Then Roger said, stiffly, "Good even to thee, Walter. Thou hast found thy way back to us, then."

"Yea, for I knew not where else to go, and the pursuit

was sharp. But I stay not unless thou wilt it, brother, Give me a night's shelter, and I will be gone to-morrow."

The altered tones of Walter's words startled Roger. Looking more closely at him, he saw, what Mistress Margaret's quick eyes had perceived at the first glance, his brother's ragged dress, and haggard face, and sunken eyes. His heart smote him, but he only answered, coldly: "Thou canst remain. I have told thee that, for our mother's sake, thou shalt be free of this house as long as she lives."

"Ay, but that was in other times. I come now as a fugitive, with a price on my head."

Roger shrugged his shoulders. "I see not that aught is altered thereby," he answered, in the same cold tone. "Thou knowest well wherefore I will hold no further converse with thee. That sin being still unrepented of"—he glanced cautiously at Mistress Sparowe, who was sobbing gently—"it doth not signify whether the Malignants be beaten or victorious. Thou art in danger, and our father's house is thy rightful shelter."

He turned to leave the room before Walter could reply, when a sudden thought seemed to strike him. "Hast given thanks to the Lord for thy deliverance?"

"And wherefore should I give thanks?" answered Walter, bitterly. "Dost thou think that so wretched a life as mine is worth preserving, when mine own brother will scarce speak with me?"

"Oh, Walter, say not so," cried Mistress Margaret. "He will relent, our stern Roger; he will forgive when his mother kneels to him for pardon and pity."

"Mother, spare thy pains," answered Walter. "He hath no pity. Nevertheless, brother, thou must tarry a moment longer. I have somewhat more to say to thee."

"Thou canst have nought to say that I desire to hear," answered Roger. "Speak thy business to our mother, and she shall tell me of it. Or, I will see thee again to-morrow."

And Roger hurried away, more agitated than he cared to confess. He took refuge in his own room, where, with his Bible before him, he endeavoured to think the

matter out, and determine what was his duty. Never, he thought, had man found himself in a more painful position. For the present, Walter must remain, at whatever risk. Even Master Burroughs could hardly wish Roger to hand his own brother over to destruction by denying him shelter, and Roger blushed with shame so much as to think of Master Burroughs' opinion at this crisis. But the longer he reflected, the more convinced he became that, for Walter's own sake, he must endeavour to convey him out of England as speedily as possible. There would be no safety for him till he was beyond seas. And while Walter remained at the Old House, he would have to submit to the most rigid secrecy. It would be necessary to conceal his presence from the servants, unless they had already heard of it through Joan, and certainly from the neighbours. The master of the house and Mistress Sparowe must go about their daily business, and meet their friends, as though nothing had happened, strictly hiding the fact that they had a rank Malignant, who had actually been in arms, under their roof. Roger sighed over the inevitable deception, and a prayer rose to his lips that the enemy of souls might not be suffered too severely to molest him, that he might not be forced into any actual falsehood.

Roger was up betimes the following morning. He was anxious not to lose a single day in making arrangements to send Walter out of England. This could not prove a difficult matter. Down by the wharf there were always plenty of vessels going to Holland, one of which, for a handsome consideration, might take his brother on board. There was much traffic at that time with the Netherlands. Trade had never been so brisk between the two countries. The new English Commonwealth naturally sought help and countenance of the older Republic, and a bond of mutual convenience, if not of affection, united them. Roger did not doubt that he should be able to find a ship going to Rotterdam or the Hague, and would succeed in persuading the captain to encumber himself with a suspicious guest.

Before he went, he wished to put his mother on her guard against revealing Walter's presence to any chance visitor. He felt that he could not speak to Walter himself. He shrank from coming in contact with him. When he thought of all that his presence might cost him, it went hard with Roger that he did not hate his brother.

Roger was not often at home of a morning. Three days a week he attended the meetings of the Corporation. At other times he was usually engaged in matters pertaining either to the government of the borough, or the administration of his own estates. When he had a leisure day he was glad to employ it, more for health's sake than for any pleasure it gave him, in hunting and fishing. Sometimes, however, business detained him at home, when he sat in his own room, close to the entrance hall, and never appeared in the family sitting rooms till noon.

As to Mistress Margaret, though considered by her neighbours somewhat of a fine lady, she was the most exemplary of housewives. Her usual resort of a morning was the buttery—a delightful room, half kitchen, half parlour. Here, and in the adjoining still room, she cooked her more delicate cakes and viands, compounded her simple medicines, saw her poorer neighbours, and otherwise busied herself in various household duties.

To his surprise, Roger did not for once find his mother here. Crossing the courtyard, he opened the door which led to the sitting rooms, and hearing voices in the wainscotted room, walked quietly in. Mistress Margaret, in a graceful morning wrapper, was sitting at the table, apparently engaged, at ten o'clock of the forenoon, in no more important occupation than talking. Her pretty hands lay idle in her lap, or played with the ribbons of her gown; her soft face was clouded with perplexity, and wrinkled as Roger had seldom seen it before. Beside her, with his back to the door, leaning forward; and talking earnestly to her in a low voice, sat his brother, as Roger supposed; and he was on the point of beckoning his mother unceremoniously from the room,

when the other, hearing his footsteps, turned. It was not Walter. In a moment, with a shock of surprise, Roger recognized the dark resolute face and flashing eyes of Ralph Wentworth.

"Well met, Roger," said Wentworth, advancing and holding out his hand, "or rather should I not say, ill-met? since thou canst scarce desire to see me here. How!" as Roger started back and an exclamation of astonishment escaped him: "Walter hath not told thee, then. Foolish lad! when I laid it on his conscience—if he hath one—not to suffer thee to sleep till the secret was out. I would not have thee kept one hour in ignorance. But he hath been for delay, all through the business."

"Thou, Ralph! here, and beneath my roof?" gasped Roger, in intense astonishment. "Now the Lord have mercy upon us all!"

"The Lord have mercy, as thou sayest, friend, for from man we are like to get none," returned Wentworth, drily. "I come to claim thy shelter, if thou wilt give it me. If not, to take my last leave of thee, for assuredly we shall not meet again in this world. Those knaves of Parliament men have run us too close to earth this time."

Roger did not answer. The blood rushed to his face as he stood, mechanically holding Wentworth's hand, and forgetting in his agitation to drop it.

"Was it ill done, Roger, to take thee thus at un-awares?" asked his friend, after a pause. "When men fly for their lives, they stay not for nice ceremony. And we have one with us, Will Somers, my serving man—'tis well thou shouldest know all. Prithee give him shelter likewise. Come, man, speak," as Roger still continued silent. "Have I strained thy friendship too far?"

"Roger, send them not from thee," pleaded Mistress Margaret tearfully, laying her hand on her son's arm. "If thou turn them away, their blood will be upon thy head. Be merciful, my son, as thou hopest for mercy thyself. An the chance of war had gone another way, thou wouldest thyself have had to fly."

"Mother, I think not to send them from me," said Roger, at last, in a husky voice. "Let them remain. As long as this house can shelter them, they shall be here." He stopped a moment, then forced himself to go on: "I tell thee, Ralph. as I told Walter yesternight, that I will protect thee so far as my power doth extend. It shall never be said that a Sparowe turned a Wentworth from his door."

"There spoke my brave-hearted Roger. Friend, I would thank thee, but words are feeble. I knew it. I told Walter 'twould be thus. I said to Will Somers that I would answer for thine honour with my life."

"'Tis no question of honour, as I take it," said Roger, hoarsely. "Christian charity and goodwill alone are concerned in it. I dare not refuse the shelter ye ask for. Only"—Roger forced a smile to his white lips—"ye must consent to lie close, else my good name will not avail to shield you."

"We will lie close as any hunted creatures," returned Wentworth, "Have no fear of us. Thou canst trust us." And then the two men looked at each other and nodded, and, without more words, the bargain was sealed. Mistress Margaret clapped her hands.

"Now thou art kind again, Roger," she cried. "I knew not—I dare not make so sure of thee as Ralph here. And now we can all rejoice and be happy. For harm cannot come of it. Who would hold thee to blame for sheltering thine own brother and dearest friend?"

Roger and Wentworth exchanged looks, but neither spoke, and Mistress Margaret continued: "And, oh, Roger! Prithee chide not thy brother so sharply as thou didst yesternight. He hath done naught to anger thee, save only that he hath espoused the King's cause."

"We will not speak of these things, mother," said Roger, gently. "Much now lieth with thee. Firstly, thou must see that our friend lacks for naught while he is with us. That I may safely leave to thee. Secondly, look to it that thou betray not his presence, or Walter's, to our neighbours by speech or sign. A word from thee may undo us all."

"It shall be seen to," answered Mistress Margaret, readily. "And now our next concern is the dinner, I trow. Alack! I have left as fine a pasty as man could wish to taste in the oven, and while I stay talking here 'twill be burnt as black as my shoe. The maids, foolish things, know not when to take a pasty from the oven. Out upon me for forgetting it, and upon you both for disturbing me when I have so much on hand!" And catching up the huge bunch of keys at her girdle, Mistress Margaret hastened to the rescue of her pie.

The two men turned, and looked at each other. "A word further with thee, Ralph," said Roger, as soon as his mother had disappeared into the buttery. "I give thee shelter freely, but this is no place for thee, or for Walter now, as thou must know. Hast devised any plan to get from hence?"

"We have friends in Harwich, who busy themselves on our behalf," answered Wentworth, "and we trust shortly to have news of a boat for Holland. We will not put thy goodness to the proof longer than needful. Roger," Wentworth went towards his friend, and laid his hand on his shoulder, "before thy mother I made somewhat light of the protection we have claimed of thee. I desired not to affright her. But think not I am ignorant or careless of thy risk. For myself, I had died sooner than ask this of thee. God forbid that, for mine own safety only, I should place thee in such jeopardy."

He stopped, and Roger, looking up, was astonished to see his usually calm face quivering with emotion. With an effort to speak cheerfully, Wentworth went on:

"We have hopes of some conveyance hence, out of England, and till the matter was arranged, we were forced to lie hidden in these parts. I knew no house but thine, where such concealment could be, and therefore I yielded to Walter, and came."

"Thou hast well done," said Roger, heartily. "Speak not of the danger, Ralph. Are we not friends, and doth not that suffice? Is there anything thou couldst ask, which I would not freely give thee?"

"Roger, I deserve not thy goodness," said Wentworth,

more moved than even the occasion seemed to warrant. "Dost thou know that we have a price on our heads, and that it is death to anyone to give us shelter?"

"Ay, I know it," answered Roger. "What of that? Do I set such store by mine own life, Ralph, that I cannot give it willingly for my friend? So I can but act rightly, and do my duty—the Lord grant me light!"

Wentworth seized his friend's hand, but before he could answer the door opened, and Walter's tall figure appeared in the entrance. He was about to enter when, glancing over his shoulder, he stopped and stood aside, to let a young man pass into the room. Two things about the stranger rivetted Roger's attention. He was struck with the incongruity between his brilliant dark eyes, delicate lips, and keen vivacious face, and the rough, dirty, serving man's suit he wore; and he could not fail to notice that Walter, who rarely showed much courtesy, even to his mother, treated with marked deference a man who, if Wentworth was to be believed, was greatly his inferior in station.

The moment Walter caught sight of his brother, he started and blushed crimson, then pushing rudely past his companion, he tried to assume a careless air, swaggered haughtily up to Roger, and wished him "Good day."

Roger absently returned his brother's greeting. His eyes were fixed upon the stranger who, after a modest bow to the company, placed himself respectfully behind Wentworth, cap in hand, and stood awaiting his orders.

"This," said Wentworth, turning to Roger, "is the serving man of whom I spoke. He hath been a faithful friend to me in the war. But for him, I had not come alive out of Worcester fight. Prithee let me bespeak thy good offices for him."

Roger did not answer. The more closely he watched the new comer, the more convinced he felt that he had seen those brilliant eyes, that swarthy face, and those thin, cynical lips before. Wentworth continued: "I have no further need for thee now, good Will. Go thou to our chamber, and see to my gear. Hold thee in

readiness to start at a moment's warning. For his sake, and our own, we will not quarter ourselves on our friend longer than need is."

The young man bowed in silence, and was on the point of going to execute his master's orders, when Roger sprang across the room, and stopped him with a sudden "Hold!" Walter darted forward with an oath, but Wentworth dragged him back, and thrust his hand over his mouth.

"What wouldest thou with my man, Roger?" he asked, and though his voice was calm, his whole frame trembled. "Methinks our talk is scarcely fit for his ears. Let him go and see to mine armour."

"This is no man of thine," said Roger, sternly. "Mock me not with a falsehood, Ralph. Is it not enough that I risk my life to shelter you, but ye must needs use further concealment? The Lord help me! Thou, and Walter, and thy friend here, ye are all deceiving me. Will not one of you speak the truth? As for this gentleman," he went on, turning to the stranger, "I have seen his face before. In Scotland, was it not? Ay, in Scotland last year, when I served against the King of Scots."

There was a dead silence. Wentworth turned ghastly pale, and bent his eyes to the ground. Walter stamped his foot and ground his teeth in futile rage and despair. Roger, trembling from head to foot, stood between the stranger and the door. The subject of the controversy alone was apparently unmoved by it. He stood still, when Roger stopped him, without offering any resistance, and tranquilly submitted to the young man's scrutinizing gaze. There was a breathless pause, while he seemed to debate something with himself: then he raised his eyes, and confronted Roger with absolute composure.

"You are right, Master Sparowe," he said, with a quiet dignity in tone and bearing which rivetted the attention of all. "'Tis a poor return for the protection you give us, to keep you in ignorance of aught that concerns you. Truly you owe us small thanks for thrusting ourselves upon you at this unwelcome juncture.

My friends here willed it so ; I had never done it without your consent. But at least there shall be no error ; you shall know whom you shelter."

"He put on the small, round cap he held in his hand, and continued : "Ten days ago, I was a King ; now—I am plain Will Somers, at your service."

Roger staggered back, horror struck. "The King of Scots!" he exclaimed wildly. "Charles Stuart himself! It cannot be!"

"So is it, nevertheless," answered the other, with a faint smile. "I have borne so many names, it signifieth little by which you please to call me. I am much beholden to you, that you dub me not forthwith the Man of Sin. Charles Stuart then it is, who asks the shelter of your house for forty-eight hours."

"The King of Scots! the King of Scots!" repeated Roger, in a terrified voice.

"King neither of Scotland or England for the nonce," returned Charles. "Now, good Master Sparowe, since our friends yonder are dumb-founded, it behoves me to use plainness of speech, and to put clearly before you how we stand. We are in your hands. Either you may deliver us up to the nearest justice, or belike you are a justice yourself, you may with your own hands clap us in ward. Or you may bid us depart in peace, which we will do forthwith, and run our chance of the Parliament men. Or you may shelter us, at the risk of your life, till we get a ship to Holland ; in which latter case I remain for ever your debtor. And, marry, I care not greatly which course of the three you take."

And Charles leant back against the door, and watched Roger's troubled face with quiet composure. A long silence ensued, a silence so painful that the actors in this strange drama scarcely dared to breathe. Walter was the first to break it. As Roger turned and looked at him and Wentworth, he held out his hands appealingly.

"Mercy, brother," he cried, "mercy! Thou art so cold and hard, I dared not tell thee. I said to Ralph that 'twas best to keep thee in ignorance. Yet oh! we

could no other. The King needed a place of safety, and I knew of none other on this coast. Thou hadst told me, too, that thou wouldest not shut me from our father's house, for any difference betwixt us."

"Be still, Walter!" said Roger, sharply. "Thou hast wrought me evil enough; prithee leave me in peace. As for you, sir, I pray you suffer me to withdraw for awhile. Matters have come to that pass that I know not how to act."

"We would not hasten your decision, sir," said Charles, with a courteous wave of the hand. "Pray you, consider it as long as you will."

"I would seek counsel of the Lord," said Roger, so earnestly that even Charles did not smile. "In a few hours, it may be, with prayer and supplication, I shall have light."

"And thou wilt not kiss the King's hand before thou goest, Roger?" asked Walter, eagerly.

"It needs not," said Charles, with a gracious smile. "The service you have already rendered, sir, makes me for ever your debtor. The excellent dinner and bed wherewith I was hospitably entertained last night, at your cost, albeit not with your knowledge, do greatly outweigh any such trifles. I' faith, I stood in sore need of both."

With a bow Roger was leaving the room, hoping to put an end to this painful scene, when Wentworth, who had been an agitated spectator, stepped up to him, and drew him aside. "Roger," he asked, "dost remember our pledge at parting on London Bridge three weeks since?"

"I mind it well, Ralph," answered Roger. "I give not my pledges lightly."

"Nor do I claim them lightly. We did swear then to stand by each other, and help each other as friends to the uttermost. Was it not so?"

Roger bent his head, and Wentworth continued: "If thy pledge had meaning in it, Roger, redeem it upon him who stands there. He is more to me than all the world besides."

"More than I, Ralph? Is it verily so? Thou dost not know him. Thou hast scarce seen him a dozen times, and we have been friends from childhood."

"Roger, thou dost not understand," interrupted Wentworth impatiently. "Thou art my friend, but he is my King. I would sacrifice thy very friendship, if need were, to secure his safety. For his sake, Roger, ask thee to fulfil the pledge. For his sake!"

Roger glanced back into the room. Charles was examining the rich carving of the wainscotting, decanting upon its beauty with the air of a connoisseur, and talking as easily to Walter, as if no lives hung in the balance.

"I understand thee now," said Roger, in a low, bitter voice. "Ralph Wentworth, I offered thee safety. Dost thou claim it for him rather than thyself?"

"Yea, for him," answered Wentworth. "Else is the pledge of no avail."

Roger put his hand over his eyes. "I see it all," he said. "Have patience with me, friend. I will lay the matter before the Lord, and peradventure it shall be as thou wilt."

And with these words, the young Puritan quitted the room.

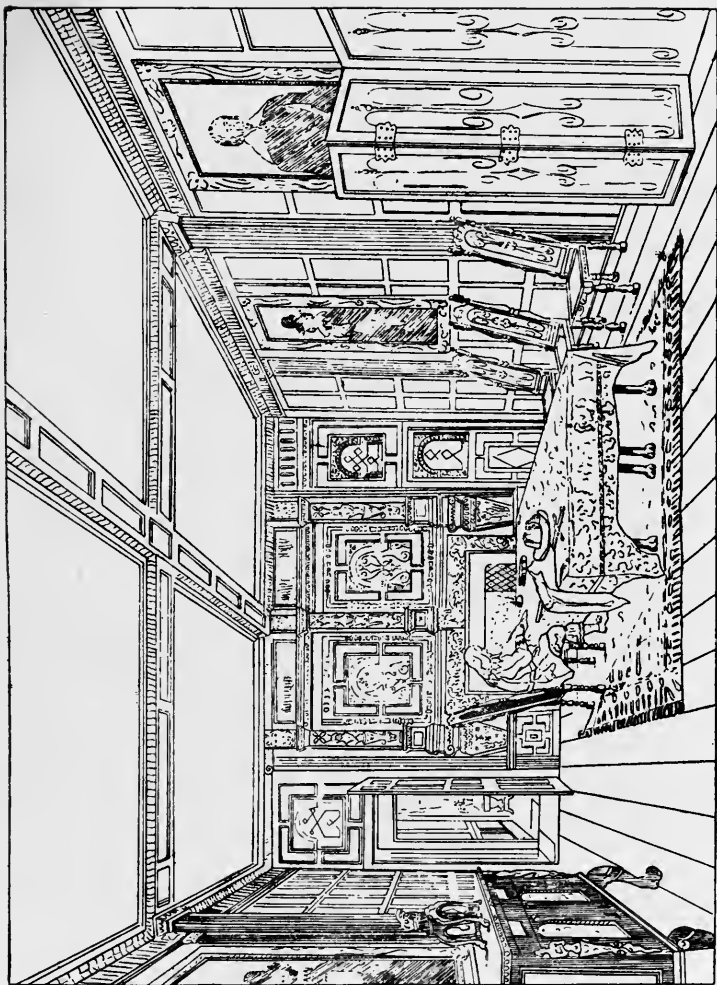
CHAPTER X.

FATHER MARTIN.

LEFT to themselves, the three fugitives held a hasty consultation. Or rather, to speak more truly, Walter and Wentworth discussed plans, and weighed the chances of escape and discovery, while the object of their anxious deliberations threw in a word here and there, sometimes apposite, often gay, and occasionally even trivial.

It was decided at once that Charles could not risk himself again in the family sitting rooms. He had already been recognized by Roger, and if he mixed freely with the company that frequented the house, his person could not fail to be known to some at least among them, more especially since the town was crowded with soldiers from Worcester. The courtyard was often full of visitors, rich and poor. People came there to see Roger on business; country neighbours rode in, and without more ceremony proceeded to "stable" their horses; poor folk waited there for Mistress Margaret, and discussed their ailments freely with the servants. In the narrow lane which ran down the side of the house was a small postern gate, much used by those who did not care to be at the trouble of making a formal entry by the great front hall. Walter knew well how frequently intimate friends of the family were in the habit of entering the courtyard by this gate, crossing over, and coming without further announcement than a knock into the sitting rooms. At any moment, then, a stranger might appear, recognize the King, and throw all their plans of concealment to the winds.

Above this room, just beneath the chapel gable, was a noble chamber. The roof of it had always excited the admiration and envy of master builders. The walls and



THE OAK PANELLED ROOM.

ceiling were united in one single vaulted arch, curiously poised, which sprang from the sides of the room at a distance of six feet from the ground, and rose to nearly treble that height. This magnificent arch culminated in the centre of the roof in a richly carved rose, and the same ornament was seen, quartered, in the four angles of the room; a delicate allusion, probably, to the three red roses which formed the Sparowe coat of arms. The room looked towards the garden, and partly because it was quiet, partly on account of its noble proportions, was usually assigned for the accommodation of guests of quality. Royalty itself before now had used this room, when honouring the Sparowe family with a visit. Here Wentworth had been formally installed, the night before, by Mistress Margaret, and a low tuckle bed hastily made up in the corner for Will Somers, which Wentworth, as soon as they were alone, lost no time in taking for himself.

Walter now proposed that his dangerous guests should establish themselves here for the present, only venturing into the lower part of the house, when he could certify that they might do so without risk. For himself, he openly declared that he did not intend to use much concealment. By this time, nearly all the servants had seen him, but being mostly old retainers of the family, they could be trusted. They were as certain as Roger himself and Mistress Margaret not to speak of their young master's return, if bidden to be silent. It was already known among them that Master Walter had brought a friend and his serving man, and that both were obliged to remain concealed for the present. Notwithstanding their curiosity, therefore, they had respected the secret, and had forbore to way-lay the serving man, and extract from him, as they were longing to do, a circumstantial account of the battle. It was more to guard against the intrusion of outsiders, than against any indiscretion on the part of the servants, that Walter entreated Charles and Wentworth to keep strictly to the alcove room for the rest of the day.

They were sitting here in anxious talk, waiting for

Roger's decision. Walter, despairing already of the result, declared that his brother would turn them out of doors, as soon as his conscience had convinced him, as it assuredly would do, that such was his duty.

"Truly, friend, I for one could scarce blame him," returned Charles. "Were I myself a Puritan, and in mine absence found my house suddenly overrun with a pack of Cavalier knaves, the keeping of whom were death to me, I would make short work of them. Out they should all go, neck and crop. I scarce see how your brother can come to any other conclusion."

"Your Majesty doth misjudge my friend, and thou, Walter, thy brother most grievously," said Wentworth, earnestly. "He is a Puritan, but likewise a man of honour, and of the tenderest heart withal. He cannot do it, 'tis not in his nature. He could never be guilty of so foul a deed, and drive us all to certain death. I had some speech with him before you came, sir, and found him the same Roger as of old, which thy words, Walter, had almost caused me to doubt."

Wentworth's passionate vindication of his friend was interrupted at this moment by a low knock at the door. He hastened to it, and cautiously asked, who stood there? To his surprise he received for answer the Royalist password "A friend to Cæsar." He turned in dismay to Walter.

"Who can this be?" he asked in a terrified whisper. "Some one is here who knoweth us already. We are betrayed, Walter."

"Prithee, let me to the door," said Walter. "I shall know who it is by the voice." And putting Wentworth aside, he bent down to the latch. A moment's whispered conference ensued, while Wentworth waited in breathless anxiety. Then saying over his shoulder: "All is well," Walter unbolted the door and threw it open.

Even Charles himself was not proof for an instant against a movement of alarm, and Wentworth strode fiercely up to the new comer, his hand on his sword. For Walter had admitted none other than a Puritan minister, in orthodox cassock and bands. His sour face

wore an expression of more than ordinary sanctity, and his short grisly beard and moustache added to his forbidding appearance.

"Whom have we here?" said Charles, forgetting in his astonishment his assumed character of Will Somers. "Reverend Sir, you have mistaken your company. We are, alas! no Puritan saints, but a couple of as arrant Cavalier rogues as were ever doomed to perdition. Your reverence may spare your prayers."

For only answer Master Sturges flung himself upon his knees, and seizing the hand of the poorly clad serving lad, covered it with tears and kisses.

"'Tis you who mistake, my liege," he cried at last, as well as his sobs would permit him, "but I wonder not at it. Even at the door I dared not remove these hateful disguises." And taking off his false beard and moustache, and removing the small velvet cap he wore, he displayed the smooth shaven face, and tonsured head of a Catholic priest. Charles was fairly startled out of his usual composure.

"Father Martin! my dear and honoured Father Martin!" he exclaimed, in a voice trembling with emotion. "Prithee how, in the name of all the Saints, came you hither? Nay, kneel not to me. 'Tis I rather who should kneel to you, and crave your blessing. My good angel it is who hath sent you to me in my sorest need."

Father Martin rose from his knees and wiped his eyes.

"Alas! that ever I should behold you in this plight, my liege," he said tearfully. "Her Majesty the Queen herself would scarce know you. Yet let me not grieve over much. One mercy at least is vouchsafed us. You are here hale and sound, though but yesterday your death was declared to me by a soldier of the fanatics, with so many circumstances thereof, that I could not but believe it."

"Heard you not that news before, father?" returned Charles, laughing. "Myself have been told it ten times at the least. I am in a manner hardened to it; the tale begins to pall upon me. We will speak of other matters, and first tell me how came you hither?"

"Hath it not then reached your Majesty's ears,—but no, the news were too trifling,—that I am now Puritan minister in this godly parish of Ipswich?"

Charles looked at the speaker for a moment, then burst out into so merry and ringing a laugh, that Wentworth laid his hand on his arm to enjoin caution.

"You, father, parish priest here? 'Tis impossible. To beard the lion in his den after that fashion! Nay, I gave you not credit for such marvellous courage. Pray you how long have you held the office?"

"For a matter of a year and more," returned Father Martin, composedly, "and I trust I have been enabled to give some help in secret to the good cause."

"I heard nought thereof," said Charles. "No news for many months past hath been suffered to come to mine ears, save such as it hath pleased those Presbyterian knaves to give me. I tell thee, father, such a life did I lead in Scotland, what with the Covenant, and the preaching and praying, and the sermons six hours in length, to listen to almost daily, that even these my wanderings seem light in comparison."

Charles heaved a deep sigh at the recollection of his Scotch experiences. "But hold," he continued, "are we not in the house of a Puritan?"

"Ay, and the rankest of them all," returned Father Martin. "I marvel that your Majesty was brought hither for shelter. There is no more hot-headed zealot in all this town than Master Roger Sparowe."

"Ah, say you so? Now mark him, Ralph."

"He hath but newly made a journey to London," continued the priest, "of set purpose to have me deprived of my cure. He had suspicions," he said.

"And not without reason, I trow. There were enough in his own house, to say nothing of the doings in the town, to cause such an one to have many suspicions. He is no fool, is this same Master Roger Sparowe. Why, father, an the good folks here saw you now, what, think you, were your fate? Hanging were too good."

"'Twas not I who adventured myself, my liege," returned the father, quietly. "I am but the hand that

executes ; our Holy Mother Church, the true head of us all, bid me to the work. From her I received the commandment to take upon me this post of danger, and I trust there are some who have cause to bless my coming."

He glanced at Walter with a smile full of meaning. The young man coloured, and looked on the ground.

"I doubt not, father," said Charles, without noticing his last words, "that wheresoever you are, the Church finds in you a faithful servant. Nevertheless, it seemeth a hazardous life to me. But how heard you of our coming ?"

"I had news of it yesternight," answered Father Martin, "and hastened hither as soon as safety would permit. For, although the news from that source hath always been trustworthy, this that was told me was so passing strange, that I could not believe it, till I had beheld your Majesty with mine own eyes."

"News of our coming yesternight ?" said Charles, with a puzzled look. "But how save through Walter here ?"

"Walter told me not," returned the priest, evasively. "Let it suffice that the news was true. And now, since your Majesty is here, suffer me to say that you can have no safer messenger than my poor self. I am well looked on by all the townsfolk ; Mistress Margaret hath made me free of this house, and I can bring you news without fear."

"We thank you, sir, for your good offer," said Wentworth, who had stood listening to the conversation in silence. "Since it pleases the King to trust you, we will gladly accept your help. This gentleman is known to you sir ?"

"Known to me ! Why, man, hast never heard speak of Father Martin ?" replied Charles. "He hath been about the Court, as one of the advisers of our mother the Queen, since I was a child. 'Twas he who helped to sell the crown jewels, and to bring arms and ammunition into the kingdom, for the furtherance of the war, about which the Parliament men made so rare a piece of work. I trust him, Ralph, as I would thee."

Wentworth listened respectfully, but his face showed

that he was ill-satisfied. Like many other ardent Royalists, he was a sincere Protestant, and cordially disliked the constant indentification of the King's cause with the Papists. It was inevitable at the present crisis ; it had, apparently, been inevitable all through the war, but Wentworth, none the less, was as bitterly opposed as any Puritan to the Queen mother and her train of priests.

"Disdain not help, even though it come from a Papist," said a low voice in his ear. Wentworth started. The priest was looking steadily at him, with a smile on his face, and seemed to read his inmost thoughts ; but before he could reply, Father Martin went on aloud : "From the same quarter from whence I received news of your Majesty, I obtained intelligence of some boats which are about to start for Holland. One of them, it is hoped, will serve your Majesty's purpose, and convey you out of the country."

"That were good news indeed," said Charles, joyfully, "the best I could have at this time. For to say truth, our lodging here is of the strangest. We are in the house of a godly Puritan, Master Roger Sparowe, who hath not yet consented to give us shelter. While we speak he is deliberating, peradventure on his knees, after the manner of our Scotch friends, whether he shall deliver us up to justice, or let us live."

"Was it well done to tell him, sir ?" asked Father Martin. "Was it not possible to hide your presence from him ?"

"It was not possible," answered Charles, quietly. "I would not have it, father ; I told him myself. And now, since you can do so much, have you no power to soften the heart of this stern fanatic, that he may keep us until the morrow ?"

"I can do nought with him, sir," answered the priest. "Master Sparowe hath an ill-opinion of me. He suspected me from the first, and I have greatly marvelled wherefore, knowing who I was, he hath not openly denounced me."

"I have told you the reason of it, father," said Walter,

coming forward. "That which keeps him back is the fear of revealing the secret of the passage, which he and I discovered after so strange a fashion. We have agreed to guard the knowledge of it jealously. Only," he went on, turning to Charles, "when your Majesty's life was in danger over at Alnesbourne, I was forced to disclose it. But I have besought you, sir, to speak to none of the means by which you entered this house."

"We are silent as the grave," answered Charles, lightly. "Tut, man, I have made acquaintance, since the day of Worcester fight, with so many secret ways and passages, and hidden chambers, and closets built into chimneys, that I should be hard put to it, six months hence, to remember any one of them."

"Concerning this boat for the Low Countries?" asked Wentworth, anxiously. "What news do you bring us, father?"

"Those that are busying themselves in the matter," said Father Martin, mysteriously, "have already partly gained the master of a small boat, which hath arrived these few days since from Holland. Interest hath been made with him, for the consideration of a round sum of money, to load again at once, and put to sea, taking on board a gentleman who hath given his creditors the slip, and his servant. Thus far have the negotiations progressed. The man is almost won, and I am sent hither to your Majesty to arrange for the final settlement."

"When can the man be ready?" asked Wentworth.

"To-morrow night, it may be, or the night after. He hath to victual his boat, and to get together some kind of cargo, that his hasty departure, when he is but newly arrived, raise not suspicion."

"How serves the tide?" said Wentworth.

"That I know not. It were an easy matter for me to come here again, and acquaint you with the hour of sailing; but those that sent me judged it wise to have some signal betwixt us, if it were possible."

"A signal were best," said Wentworth, decisively. "It may be safe for you, father, to come hither, but not so safe for the King to be seen in your company"

"From whence doth the boat sail?" asked Walter.

"From Harwich," answered Father Martin, "but 'tis agreed that she shall come up the river as far as her draught will permit. A light river skiff shall be kept in readiness here, near Stoke Bridge, and your Majesty can drop down in her, as soon as the boat appears."

"At Stoke Bridge, beyond St. Peter's Church?" asked Walter again. "The signal then is easy. Let them show a light from the mast-head of the boat, and we can see it from the little window in the chapel. You know it well, father. We have often watched the ships in the river from thence."

Walter's plan seemed feasible, and was readily adopted. It was agreed that the signal should be a light three times shown, at intervals of a minute, from the boat. Everything appeared to promise well, when Charles, who had listened with his usual careless air, suddenly struck into the conversation.

"Hold, father," he said, "one thing hath been forgotten. Let the skipper know that he hath three passengers to convey."

"Three!" exclaimed Father Martin in consternation. "Sir, it is impossible. The pass is for two only. The man will raise some demur, and cry off from his bargain, when he findeth the number of fugitives increased."

"We will all go or none," answered Charles. "Think you I will leave this lad behind? We owe it to him that we are here at all."

"It cannot be," cried Father Martin wringing his hands in despair. "Would your Majesty, then, imperil your own precious person for the sake of a boy?"

"If need be, yes," replied Charles, firmly. "Had he not led us by cross-roads and bye-ways so intricate that none had known them save one born in the country, we could never have baffled the hot pursuit. Without him, those hounds of fanatics had trapped us long ago. And hath he not placed his whole family in jeopardy to save my worthless life? You mistake me, father. He shall not be left behind."

"Think not of me, my liege," cried Walter, flinging

himself on his knees and covering Charles' hand with tears and kisses. "Better that I should die a thousand deaths than a hair of your Majesty's head should be imperilled."

Charles rubbed his hand over his rough crop of short black hair. "Good Master Walter," quoth he, with a smile, "all the hair on mine head would scarce make one of your dainty love locks. Wilmot's shears did their work well, methinks. But as regards this matter, save yourselves further speech. My resolve is taken."

In vain did Wentworth and Father Martin expostulate. Charles, usually so easily led, was for once immoveable, and turned a deaf ear to Walter himself, when he tearfully begged to be allowed to shift for his own safety."

"With a Puritan brother, and a town full of fanatic soldiers, fresh from victory. Nay, man, I know the country better than you. In three days' time the place will be too hot to hold any one of us. Thy brother protect thee! Why, they will put such force upon his conscience that he will think, forsooth, it is his bounden duty to deliver thee up. Either thou shalt come with us, or we will all stay."

Sorely against his better judgment, Father Martin was forced to promise that, through the mysterious agency to which he had already referred, he would arrange with the skipper to take Walter also on board. He contented himself with warning his confederates that the whole negotiation might thereby fall through. As to leaving the house unseen, as soon as the signal was given from the river, that was no difficult matter. A sort of alcove, adorned with huge figures painted in Dutch tiles, ran the length of the two sitting rooms on the ground floor, on the opposite side to the courtyard. It ended in a passage leading to a small side door, which opened into a lane at the back of the house. The lane joined the road which led in almost a straight line to St. Peter's Church, and on to the river side. This was the exit Walter proposed to make use of, and as the servants' rooms were all in the other part of the house, he hoped that the travellers would be able to slip out unperceived.

Matters being at last arranged, Father Martin rose to take his leave. There was a pause, as he drew his cassock over his shoulders, which the warmth of the room had made him throw off. He hesitated, as if something still remained to be said, and glanced doubtfully at Walter. Then, approaching Charles, the priest said something to him in a low voice. Charles started, and looked at his companions.

"Here, father? In the house of a Puritan? How could such a thing be? For his brother's sake, Master Walter dare not connive."

"Walter would not only connive, but rejoice to participate," returned Father Martin. "Your Majesty hath seen the chapel here. Many a time since my coming hath it been put to its rightful use."

"'Tis not for me to make objection," returned Charles, shrugging his shoulders, "albeit I am not altogether of your way of thinking, father. If Walter here hath nought to say to it" . . .

"The Sparowes were of the true faith formerly, my liege. The father of these lads was the first Puritan of the stock."

"Well, be it so, then," said Charles, with a curious smile. "This house is full of mystery, but none, methinks, is greater than this, that the Catholic worship should be established under the roof of a fanatic. Doth he know of it? Marry, I never felt compassion for a Puritan before, but I could find it in my heart to pity Master Roger Sparowe."

Charles' pity would probably have been mixed with contempt, could he have seen how Roger was employed at this moment. Deceived by his brother, thwarted by his dearest friend, entangled in a web of intrigue and duplicity utterly abhorrent to his candid nature; and, above all, burdened with the most frightful responsibility ever thrust upon unwilling shoulders, Roger had, on entering his room, flung himself on his knees. In this attitude he remained for hours. As a Puritan, he was bound to believe himself one of the elect, to whom the Divine light and guidance would always, and on the

instant, be vouchsafed. But, alas! pray as he would, the light did not come. No answer seemed to be given to his passionate supplication, no heaven-sent impulse showed him what he ought to do. In despair he sprang to his feet, and snatched up his Bible, "to try the spirits by the Word of God." It was a method of solving doubts much in favour among the Puritans, but it also failed him. Not a text could he find applicable to his present difficulties.

Then Roger began to torture himself with rigid self-examination. Heaven could not be wrong; it must be some sin within his own heart which kept back the answer to his prayer. He tested his purity of motive by every method of self-analysis practised in a morbidly religious age, till the natural result ensued, and he fancied himself the most depraved of sinners. But still the heavens "were as brass above him."

From a worldly point of view, there could be no question of the course he should adopt. Apparently interest and religion were for once agreed. Both bade him set his conscience at rest, and deliver the men up to justice, who had taken shelter under his roof, without his permission or knowledge. That one was his brother, and another his friend, was an argument which, he knew, ought not to influence him. Any Puritan casuist would have told him that the guilt of the third party far outweighed any tender considerations to which the other fugitives might be entitled. If the argument were raised, that no crime could be alleged against Charles, save that he had taken up arms to resist a government which he regarded as a usurpation of his rights, Roger would not have endorsed it. To him, as to every Puritan, the very name of Stuart was hateful. He was willing to acknowledge his pledge to Wentworth, but no tie of loyalty bound him to Wentworth's master.

The more Roger pondered the question, the more bewildered he became. If he gave the fugitives up to justice, or sent them away, he would be lacking in the Christian charity he was bound to show to all men. If he allowed them to remain, he would have to bear the

sting of a guilty conscience, to lend himself to tacit, if not open deceit, and to incur, as he verily believed, the anger of the Lord. He rose from his knees, and paced the room, moody and defiant. Since light came not, since help was not vouchsafed, his baser nature began to get the upper hand. He would send these men away, with as much care for their safety as possible. He would not for their sakes forfeit his peace of mind, nor blight all his hopes. For assuredly, if tidings came to Master Burroughs' ears that Roger was tampering with the Royalists, to say nothing of harbouring the arch-traitor himself, the young man would fare badly at his hands.

Suddenly, as he stood by an open window, his last conversation with Alice Burroughs came to his mind. Again he seemed to hear her soft voice saying: "We forget oftentimes the simple law of charity to our neighbours." And in an instant all the elaborate arguments he had built up to justify himself, fell to pieces, and Roger knew that he could not follow his own wishes, that he dared not sacrifice these men, who had trusted their lives in his hands, be they who they might. And after this manner his prayer was heard.

An hour later, when he came to the alcove room, he found Wentworth alone. His friend did not guess, as Roger quietly announced that he was willing to run the risk of giving shelter to him and his companion, through what a conflict the young man had passed. Roger's pale face was as calm as usual. He seemed indeed far less agitated than Wentworth, who, since the others left him, had paced the room incessantly, chafing against his own bitter, anxious thoughts. The high-minded Cavalier was sorely troubled at the further deception to which he had been forced unwillingly to lend himself. He could not endure to think that the King he so passionately loved was, at this moment, taking part in a Catholic service. Nor was he comforted by the careless remark Charles had whispered to him as he left the room, that "anything was better than those canting Presbyterian sermons."

It was a great relief to Roger to find that his inconvenient guests were as anxious to take their departure, as he to be rid of them. But when Wentworth began to enter into the question of ways and means, Roger stopped him.

"I have no desire to know what thou art about to do," he said. "It were far safer not to tell me. This house is for thy use, and thy companions, as long as ye choose to remain here, but prithee seek not much speech of me. For your own sakes, and not to raise suspicions, it were better thus. Let me go mine own way as heretofore."

"Thou art right, Roger, but it grieves me to bring thee to it. I know thy tender conscience putteth thee to sore straits. Alack that I am forced to ask so much of thee!"

"We will not speak of these things, Ralph," answered Roger, quietly, "The heart knoweth its own bitterness. I trust only that the Lord hath given me grace to see what I ought to do."

"Nay, thine own honourable nature it is which hath led thee right. 'Tis the old story, Roger. A Sparowe and a Wentworth, and a Sparowe giveth himself again for his friend. Wouldest thou have done it without me, and the pledge I was bound to claim of thee? Pray God thou lose not in the end that which might be dearer than life itself."

"'Tis done now, Ralph. Prithee speak not further of it," answered Roger, hastily. "Meanwhile there is one thing more I would ask of thee, and then it shall be agreed between us, not to see each other, unless need arise. My mother—how much does she know of this business?"

"She hath only heard," answered Wentworth, "that I am here, and that I have a young serving man in my company. But thou wilt see her shortly, and I beseech thee, friend, enjoin earnestly upon her the fearful need for secrecy. Charge her, as she values her son's life, that she tell no one of our coming. I fear thy mother's tongue, Roger, more than ought else, but thou knowest, doubtless, how to deal with her."

"I will do thy behest to the utmost," answered Roger. "And now, Ralph, we part. Prithee fret not thyself because of any hurt thou doest me. If harm come of this business, I am well able to bear it. My life is not more at stake than thine."

"Ah, if thou wert one of us!" sighed Wentworth, his dark eyes suddenly moist with tears. "Ours is a noble cause, fit to nerve any man to act the hero, but thou hast no such consolation."

"Nay," answered Roger, with a faint smile, "to me mine seemeth the nobler cause. Canst thou not believe in it, Ralph? For what higher purpose can a man strive than to do right?"

"But thy duty, were it not, to deliver us up?"

"So I thought this morning," answered Roger, "but now I see it otherwise. The Lord hath shown me that I have a duty to my neighbour, as well as to mine own soul."

"How, to thy neighbour only!" echoed Ralph, frowning. "Dost thou not owe allegiance to the King?"

"We have a King over us, and His name is the Lord of Hosts," answered Roger. "He whom thou callest King is no more to me than Charles Stuart."

"Why dost thou shelter us, then, if thou dost not hold thyself bound to the King?"

"For love of thee, Ralph, and Walter. And likewise, and chiefly, because I take it to be the will of the Lord, and my duty."

Wentworth took his friend's hand. "So thou do it, Roger, that is all we ask of thee. Whether from love of thy King and thy cause, as thou sayest, or for love of our King and cause, the act is the same, and I thank thee heartily."

And with these words, the two men embraced, and went their ways.

CHAPTER XI.

THE FACE AT THE WINDOW.

MASTER NEHEMIAH BURROUGHS had been in much perplexity of mind since Roger's last visit to Mote End. The young man's suit for his daughter's hand had taken the old Puritan at unawares, and he was not sure whether the ambiguous answer he had returned had been altogether wise. He had no intention of losing so excellent a prospect of settling his daughter in life. In every respect save one, no better son-in-law could be desired than Roger Sparrowe.

He was rich in land, the only form wealth could take in those days. About a hundred and fifty years before, a younger branch of the Sparowes had migrated from their original home at Somersham to Ipswich. The elder line had failed, and the Somersham estates, which were strictly entailed, had reverted to the Ipswich representatives of the family. They had also acquired considerable property in the town itself, and Roger Sparowe, now head of the house, owned much land in the county.

Furthermore, he had the inestimable advantage of birth. The Sparowes had not, it is true, come over with the Conqueror, but so many noble families had perished in the Wars of the Roses that it was a distinction only to have survived them. Wealth could be acquired. Estates, since the dissolution of the monasteries, were plentiful; but ancient descent, as Master Burroughs, who traced his own from his grandfather, a silk mercer in the time of Queen Elizabeth, sometimes ruefully acknowledged, was unattainable. The more he thought of Roger Sparowe, and of Roger Sparowe's ancestors, the more delighted he felt at the thought of connecting himself with him.

There was one drawback to this glowing prospect. Roger Sparowe shared his ancestral home, not only with his mother, a vain and foolish woman, a Royalist and an Anglican, but with a brother who, if report spoke true, leaned strongly to Popery itself. Rumours had reached Master Burroughs that young Walter Sparowe, for all his innocent, boyish face, and frank manners, was deeply concerned in Malignant, and even in Catholic plots. It had actually been whispered to him, under the seal of the strictest secrecy, that there was one chamber in the Old House never opened, and unknown perhaps even to the master, where the abomination of the Mass itself had been perpetrated.

To look into Roger's earnest candid face, was enough to know that he was not privy to such foul deeds, but Master Nehemiah was not satisfied. Roger was an excellent youth, a godly youth, but he lacked the zeal against the enemies of the Lord which formed so prominent a feature of the Puritan code. Before his carefully trained daughter could enter the house, Master Burroughs felt that it must be purified from the least taint of suspicion. Mistress Margaret might be honourably banished to the family dower house, and if there were any difficulties in the way of an income for her, he was ready to bear his share. But it was still more necessary that the scapegrace, Walter, should be forbidden to return to the house for ever, unless he gave satisfactory proof of repentance and amendment.

But now Master Burroughs was thrown into fresh perplexity of mind. Tidings reached him through a reliable channel that this worthless fellow, Walter, who had saved his head at Worcester, when far better men were killed, was not only himself in hiding at the Old House, but had brought two or three other fugitives with him. Master Nehemiah could not believe it. Roger had positively declared, only two days ago that he and his brother had quarrelled and parted for ever, and yet, if report spoke true, Walter was actually at that very moment under his roof. If this were so, if Roger had been guilty of such gross deception, Master

Burroughs swore—for although a Puritan, he did swear sometimes, under great provocation—that the young man had paid his last visit to Mote End, and taken his last look at fair Mistress Alice.

Master Nehemiah was puzzled. There was a mystery somewhere, which even his astuteness could not fathom. He knew Roger too well, lightly to credit him with false dealing. At last he seemed to see his way out of the difficulty. He would pay Master Sparowe a visit, without previous notice, and taking him thus at unawares, he would be able to judge if he were maligned or no.

He approached his task diplomatically. Knowing that Roger would have to be cautiously treated, and the secret—if there were one—drawn from him in the most guarded manner, the sharp-witted old Puritan determined to take Alice with him. He would tell her nothing. It would not be safe to breathe the report to her, for, guileless as she was, she was sure to betray her knowledge. But it was just possible that Roger, if really in trouble, might confide his difficulties to her, and he was certain to be so engrossed by her, that Master Burroughs would be able to pursue his investigations undisturbed.

Kezia had now recovered from her sickness, and great was her wrath when she found that her father intended to take her younger sister instead of her. Visits in those days were matters of much ceremony, and it was almost a point of honour with Kezia—much as she hated Mistress Sparowe—to go herself. She alleged half-a-dozen domestic duties as a reason for keeping Alice at home, and was not more mortified than astonished when her father overruled them all. Master Burroughs had an object in view, and even Kezia's imperative wishes could not be allowed to stand in the way.

One fine afternoon in September, therefore, the very day after the last sheaf of corn had been carried home, Alice mounted pillion behind her father, and rode off to pay her first visit to the Old House. Yes, she was verily going at last to see Master Sparowe's house, of which

she had heard so much. Strange to say, although she lived so near, she had scarcely been a dozen times in Ipswich in her life. Ladies in those days seldom or never left their homes. They were too necessary to their households and their poor neighbours to be much abroad. The housekeeping at Mote End, under Kezia's vigorous rule, was not so onerous but that Alice might sometimes have been spared. But the disturbed state of the country for the last ten years, furnished an ample excuse for keeping her a prisoner within the grim walls of Mote End. This journey to the Old House, therefore, from the moment her father proposed it, assumed in hereyes a quite immeasurable importance. It was an epoch in her uneventful life. Outwardly calm and composed as usual, she was inwardly brimming over with girlish excitement and delight, as she tripped down the broad steps, gave her hand to her father, and was swung lightly up to the pillion.

Another day had come, and Roger Sparowe, partly in dismay, partly in exultation, reckoned that his dangerous guests had already been nearly forty-eight hours under his roof. The time had gone so slowly that it seemed as if he had been living for months on the edge of a volcano. That morning, however, Wentworth had positively assured him that the fugitives would no longer require the generous shelter he gave them. The final arrangements had now been made for a ship to convey them to Holland, and the skipper was only waiting for a favourable tide to run up as near the town as possible and take them off. Since early morning watch had been kept at the window looking from the chapel, to catch the first signal which was to bid them prepare to start. At his own request, Roger was left in ignorance of the time of their actual departure. He only knew that to-night, at latest, would see his house freed from these terrible visitors. Twelve hours more and he was safe!

Considering all the events which had since happened, it is scarcely wonderful that Roger's visit to Mote End seemed for the time a matter of secondary importance.

He had hardly leisure of mind to think of it at all, and when he did, it was as a fair dream which he had dreamt long ago. The interest of it had paled before weightier concerns. It was far enough from his thoughts now, as he stood in one of the beautiful oriel windows of the large banqueting room. He could not set about his ordinary business, though he knew that nothing would more certainly give rise to suspicions than this desultory loitering. Suddenly he saw a big horse and a well-known rider crossing the open market place. He leant forward in horror. He could not be mistaken. It was the burly form of Master Burroughs, and behind him, peeping over his shoulder, a fair face flushed with pleasure and excitement. Father and daughter appeared like strangers from another land. Never before had Mistress Alice come to see him, and now the sight of her filled Roger with amazement and consternation. Fate was hard upon him. At any other time, with what unutterable joy would he have welcomed the lady of his love!

He shook off these thoughts with a strong effort, and went down to greet his guests. But the touch of Alice's hand, as he helped her to alight, sent a fresh pang of terror through him. What if she should guess anything! see anything! If the terrible secret he was guarding at the risk of his life should come to her knowledge! As he led her ceremoniously into the great hall, where Mistress Margaret had not yet appeared, and excused his mother's momentary absence, his heart was beating wildly. And his alarm was not groundless. Master Burroughs, as he entered the hall, cast a sharp inquisitive glance round it, and into every corner, which warned Roger that the visit was not without a purpose.

It was assumed, as a matter of course, that the travellers had come to dinner. No one, in those hospitable days, paid a visit, even at a distance of a few miles only, without being invited to break their fast, and a refusal would have been an insult to the host. Master Burroughs of course protested that his boots were not fit for a lady's dining room, and Alice that she was in

travelling costume, but the moment she removed her cloak, she showed that she was speaking for form's sake only. Puritan though she was, her dress would bear comparison with Mistress Margaret's much more elaborate attire. There was always about her a certain exquisite freshness, as if she came straight that very moment from her toilette, and she did not belie her usual appearance to-day. There was not a speck of dust from the journey on her grey gown, as she shook it out into soft folds round her. Her white linen collar and cuffs were as spotless as if she had that moment put them on; and the kerchief at her throat, edged with a little embroidery worked by her own dainty fingers, was of the finest and clearest lawn.

Dame Margaret, being town bred, had always affected a certain elegance and richness of dress which were not strictly in keeping with a country squire's wife. Although a housekeeper who saw to everything herself, she would sometimes have found time hang heavy on her hands, had not the care of her wardrobe proved an unfailing source of occupation and amusement. And dress at that period assumed a real importance and significance. Men and women, men perhaps more than woman, were ranked according to the plainness or richness of their attire, in one or other of the two great parties into which England was divided.

Mistress Margaret, therefore, the moment the tidings of Master Burroughs' arrival reached her, determined to affront the stern old Puritan with one of her richest gowns. Joan acted as tire-woman on these occasions, and desperate were the struggles of mistress and maid not to keep the guests waiting longer than courtesy would allow, and yet to arrange stomacher, lace collar, and ruffles with becoming taste. If the lady's mischievous intention was to irritate her guest, she amply succeeded. At sight of her costly gown, the price of a month's wage to a poor man, Master Burroughs felt the same movement of fanatical rage as was excited in him by all the proceedings of the Royalists. It seemed to him that he beheld the skirts of the scarlet woman of

Babylon. He could have torn the dress off Mistress Margaret's back, and her manifest pleasure in her own appearance only increased his anger. But he controlled himself. The lady of the gorgeous gown might perchance be exceedingly useful to him before the day was over.

Out of the little company who gathered round the table Alice was the least agitated. Yet even she was not as composed as usual. Her heart beat foolishly every time Roger Sparowe came near her, and she was childishly awed at the sight of his mother, whom she had not seen a dozen times before, and who impressed her now, as always, with an overwhelming sense of aristocratic grace and elegance. Alice blushed to think that, two days ago, she had actually taken upon herself to plead the cause of this stately lady. Never had she felt more awkward and country-bred. Never had she been more convinced that she was utterly unfit for the position which, deny it as she would, she knew might, at any moment, be her's.

But all these, and a thousand other innocent fancies, were put to flight by the discovery that Roger himself was changed. He was as deferential to her as ever, but graver and more silent than she had seen even him before. Every word seemed to cost him an effort, and to look at her was almost beyond his strength. His face was white and haggard, and he was evidently ill at ease. Once or twice, when the door opened suddenly, he started and turned hastily towards it, and Alice fancied, she hardly knew why, that when her father spoke, it brought a deeper shade over Roger Sparowe's worn face.

These signs of discomfiture were not lost upon Master Burroughs. He noted everything, Roger's restless anxiety, and Mistress Margaret's fluttered and uneasy spirits. These two people, he said to himself, had some guilty secret on their conscience. He had done well to come, and to bring Alice with him; with her innocent help he hoped to discover the mystery before he left.

"What news may you have, Mistress Sparowe, of your younger son?" he asked, during a pause in the meal, when he fancied Roger's attention was wholly occupied with Alice. "Hath an old friend leave to ask after him?"

"Surely, sir, I am but too pleased that you remember him," answered Mistress Margaret, the colour rushing into her fair face. "We have certain and joyful intelligence that my son Walter is safely come out of the battle, without hurt to life or limb."

"Ah, he hath escaped. Not many Malignants, I trow, have fared as well, for the Lord delivered them into our hands, and the slaughter was great. And whither hath he gone, madam?"

Dame Margaret winced, and cast an appealing glance at Roger, who had stopped his conversation with Alice, and was listening anxiously. "He is, we trust, in safety," she answered, cautiously.

"In safety! It were no easy matter to have him in safety. Trust him not to the care of any chance keeper," said Master Burroughs, with an air of benign interest. "For I dare assure you, that the price set on the heads of these Malignants is high enough to tempt any poor man to betray them. Too high, methinks, even for the purpose of securing them, for money is scarce with us. And it is death to harbour them."

Mistress Margaret uttered a little scream, but before she could answer, Roger interposed from the other end of the table.

"Master Burroughs," he said, "try not my mother, I pray you, with further questions. That which you seek to know I will myself tell you. My brother is under the shelter of this roof, and here he will remain until we are able to bestowe him elsewhere with safety."

Alice could not repress a start of astonishment, but Master Burroughs was equal to the occasion.

"It is well, my son," he answered suavely. "'Let brotherly love continue,' saith the Scripture. I rejoyce that you act so Christian a part towards him, even though it be at the risk of your own life. Suffer me

only to put you in remembrance of a certain word that fell from you on your last visit to me. You were pleased them to declare that Master Walter had left this house for ever, and that you and he thought never to meet again."

"You speak truly, sir," replied Roger. "I knew not when I spoke that he was here. Nevertheless I have not departed from that which I said. As brothers, Walter and I meet no more, but as a fugitive he claimeth from me pity and compassion, like any other. Dare I, who profess to exercise Christian charity towards all men, turn mine own brother from our father's house when he is in need?"

There was a dead silence. Alice's eyes were full of tears, and even Master Burroughs seemed somewhat awed. At last Mistress Margaret asked anxiously: "Is there danger, think you, good Master Burroughs, in giving shelter to those who have escaped? Surely, if any inquisition is made, none can blame us for a deed of mercy."

"Danger, yes madam," returned the Puritan, recovering himself. "Our friend here hath spoken so worthily, that I will not gainsay him, whether it be, or be not his duty to shelter his brother. If it please you to take the risk, I know not who should inform against you. But if so be that there were other Malignants here in hiding," he fixed his keen eyes on Mistress Margaret's terrified face, "and a man came to know of it, it would go hardly with them, look you. To my poor thinking, he were bound in honour to declare it."

Mistress Margaret vainly tried to stifle a little cry of horror, and Roger said, sternly, with a strong effort: "I pray you, sir, to leave my mother in peace. She hath had much to try her, my brother's absence, and the long uncertainty concerning him, and the pressing risk to his person. It were cruel to affright her further with dark hints, which savour of threats. My duty lieth plainly before me, to comfort her, and give shelter to my brother. What say you, Mistress Alice?" he continued, forcing himself to speak in a cheerful tone.

"Since dinner is ended, shall we go into the garden ? 'Tis cooler than the house to-day."

And rising, Roger bowed to his guest with a stately composure at which he was himself surprised, and taking her hand he led her into the wainscotted room, and through its open windows on to the lawn, while Master Burroughs followed ceremoniously with Mistress Sparowe.

Alice was not sorry to escape from the house. She felt as if the air indoors would stifle her. It was like the sulphurous atmosphere before a thunderstorm. There was a strange tension, which she could not understand, in every word spoken at the table. Her father seemed in some incomprehensible way to be playing with edged tools, and evidently possessed a secret power over Mistress Margaret, which Alice was sorry to see him exercise. While, as for Roger, she could tell as she walked beside him, by the very difficulty he found in moderating his step to her's, that his rigid control over himself was strained to the utmost. Everyone was more irritated and angry than was usual in polite society, and Alice felt a yearning to soothe and comfort them, did she but know how to begin.

"'Tis a pretty garden this, and none too small for a town," she said, after they had taken a few turns up and down in silence. "I knew not that so fair a piece of ground lay behind the house. But the flowers, poor things!" Alice looked round with a compassionate smile. "Pardon me, Master Sparowe, but doth anyone tend them?"

"Doubtless someone hath charge of them," answered Roger. "My mother hath not so great love of flowers as you, Mistress Alice. So she can have some, now and again, to adorn her dress, or a bunch of marigolds to make the broth savoury, or thyme and lavender to sweeten the linen, she is content. She hath not the time, she saith, for such tender care of them as you bestow. Methinks, too, that our town air is ill-suited to flowers."

"It may be so," answered Alice, thoughtfully. "But to

have no time for flowers—one had as lief have no time for children. Your lady mother must be strangely busy.”

“She is ever hurried,” answered Roger, with a faint smile. “I say not she is always busy.”

“Yet be it in town or country,” continued Alice, as she raised the drooping head of a rose, “flowers will surely thrive, if they be loved. Look you now,” she shook out the cup of the rose, which was full of water, “this poor flower hath had too much of the bountiful rain of yesternight, and is like to be drowned in it. Now it is not overburdened, it will revive in the sunshine.”

Roger watched her deft fingers. “Is there anything, Mistress Alice, that you do not love and tend? The other day ’twas the poor sick-folk, to-day it is the flowers. An you were my sister, I should be jealous of them.”

“Nay, they need me,” answered Alice, simply. “Kezia loveth them not, and oftentimes she saith that my care of them is sinful. But I cannot forbear it. The Lord hath not made them so fair that we should neglect them. And when I see them droop I am pained at heart. Doth a thing want me, straightway I am impelled to care for it.”

“And if a man need thee sorely, sweet Mistress Alice, and were in dire want of care and comfort, wouldest thou feel the like?”

Alice blushed crimson. “I know not, Master Sparowe,” she answered, hesitating. “I have not thought of it. Only the flowers and the sick-folk have needed me hitherto, and my father at times. Perchance, if it were so”

And Alice in her embarrassment looked at the garden, and up at the house, and anywhere away from the eyes which were watching every breath she drew. Half consciously she gazed at the picturesque irregularity of outline, and traced the many gables and richly-carved wood work of the building. Suddenly she started violently, and Roger, no less agitated, looked up. To his horror he perceived that Alice’s eyes were fixed

upon the chapel gable, which was just visible beyond the nearer projection of the alcove room. From this particular spot in the garden, and from nowhere else, the little window of the chapel was visible; and at this moment a face was seen at that window, which Alice knew did not belong to any member of the Sparowe family. A young man, with swarthy skin, dark, closely-cropped hair, and brilliant black eyes, was looking out over the garden, and at the view of the town beyond. It was not one of the serving men, Alice saw at a glance. The thin, cynical lips, and graceful poise of the head, marked the owner of the face at once as a gentleman.

Frightened at the unexpected apparition, she looked round at Roger, and saw an expression of mingled terror and anger on his white face. It darkened as she had never seen it darken before. He stared up at the window fiercely, almost defiantly; then recollecting himself with a shudder, he glanced over his shoulder, and drew a deep breath when he saw that Master Burroughs and his mother were engaged in earnest conversation at the further end of the garden.

It was all over in a moment, and when Alice again ventured to look up, the face at the window had vanished like a dream. "Master Sparowe, what is it?" she asked, in an awe-struck whisper. "Who is that man, and what doth he there?"

"Ask me not, Mistress Alice," he answered in a trembling voice. "Ask me concerning nought that you see or hear. None of it is fit for your knowledge. I have done greivous wrong. A snare hath been laid for my feet, and I am fallen into it." His voice sank to a whisper, but Alice caught his words.

"You are over strict with your own conscience, sir," she said, gently. "I were loath to believe that you had done wrong. What! may not a friend of yours, whose face is unknown to me, look forth from a window, but you must straightway accuse yourself of sin? But 'tis passing strange," she went on, turning towards the building, and examining it more closely, "that I had not seen that gable before, nor the window, and yet we have

walked here for full half-an-hour. I have heard tell that the house is an old place, and full of secrets."

Alice did not see the look of agony on Roger's face, and she went on innocently: "Over what room doth that gable lie? A lofty room it must be, or else high in the roof. I would fain see it. Perchance we might light on some dark corner, where a man might lie hidden" She stopped abruptly, as Roger seized her hand.

"This way, Mistress Alice," he said, hurrying her down the path. "Come this way, I pray you. And, as you have any regard for me, and desire not to compass my destruction, speak no more of that window, nor of the gable, nor of aught that you have seen."

Alice was puzzled and grieved at the effect of her words.

"Surely, since you desire it, I will be silent," she said. "But what doth it mean, Master Sparowe? and why is my father so strange to-day, and seemeth to seek a quarrel, though his words are smooth?"

"Mistress Alice," said Roger, taking her hand, and looking earnestly into her frightened face, "I would give the half of my possessions, an I dared tell you what it means. But I cannot speak. The lives of others are in my hand."

"Your brother?" questioned Alice. "Nay, we rejoice, my father and I, that you have him here with you in safety, after your great anxiety concerning him. You cannot lay blame to yourself that you give him shelter, even though you risk, may be, a fine by concealing him."

"I shrink not from any risk," answered Roger, steadily. "Nevertheless, sweet lady, pray for me, pity me, and—trust me. To-morrow I am a free man. To-morrow you shall know all."

Roger bent over Alice's little hand, and a hot tear fell upon it as he raised it to his lips.

"Good Master Sparowe," said Alice, in a trembling voice, "my speech paineth you, I know not wherefore. I pray you to believe that I would not hurt you by so much as a word. To trust you is a simple matter, for I

have always trusted you. Only I grieve to see you in such trouble, and not to bring you any comfort."

"You do comfort me," said Roger, his voice breaking at last. "So Mistress Alice will trust me, and mine own conscience acquit me, I care not if the whole world rise up against me."

Roger's eyes were more eloquent than his words. It was not in human nature wholly to mistake their meaning. Distracted by doubt as to the nature of the crime he appeared to impute to himself, perplexed by the mystery which confronted her at every step, Alice was nevertheless strangely joyful. Something, she scarcely knew what, had happened to her. Roger Sparowe had come, evidently, to some crisis in his fate when he wanted help and support, and it was to her he turned. Alice was content.

When the young people rejoined their elders, Roger was dismayed to see that Master Burroughs' face wore an expression of triumph. The young man had fallen into the trap laid for him. He had suffered himself to be wholly absorbed in Alice's society, and her father, once alone with Mistress Margaret, had, without difficulty, gradually drawn from her all she knew about her visitors. For forty-eight hours Dame Margaret had borne the weight of her secret, and to no living soul, save Joan, had she dared to breathe a word of it. To gossip with her neighbours was indeed an impossibility, since Roger, as soon as he knew to whom he had given shelter, mounted guard over his mother, and kept her an unconscious prisoner in her own house.

Now at last she had an opportunity of unburdening her mind; and though she had hitherto rather dreaded than liked Master Burroughs, she found him to-day so kind, so sympathetic, so interested in all that concerned her, that five minutes' conversation was sufficient to unloose her tongue. She soon began to reproach herself for her former uncharitable thoughts of him. In a short time the wily old Puritan knew all about Walter, Wentworth, and as much of the young serving man as the lady could tell him. True, she had not much to say

about this last guest, for Will Somers had been kept as far as possible out of her sight. But the moment she made mention of him, Master Burroughs began to suspect that Ralph Wentworth was not the only fugitive of rank to whom Roger was giving shelter. In vain Mistress Margaret assured him that the groom was a little insignificant fellow, the most stupid lad she had ever seen, and that, though she had spoken kindly to him when she met him once or twice about the house, he had never seemed able to answer her civil questions. Master Burroughs listened to her in silence, seeing that to press her would only rouse suspicion. None the less did he feel assured that he held now the clue to the mystery.

Having already learnt far more than he had ventured to expect, he had just begun to think of finding his daughter, and taking leave, when Roger and Alice appeared. Master Burroughs' exultation for once exceeded the bounds of prudence.

"I' faith, you lead a gay life here, Master Roger, for all your professions of godliness," he exclaimed. "Guests, forsooth, and, as I understand, persons of quality in disguise! You hide your birds rarely well, good sir, and put a fair face on it to the world. Some day it may chance that I shall take an opportunity of seeing them, and exploring the secrets of this fine old place of yours."

Roger's fortitude had been severely tested of late, and features and voice were under perfect control as he answered quietly: "Some day, sir, I shall be proud to show you mine house; for the present I pray you to excuse me. I have, as you say, guests with me, whose convenience I must consider."

"Fine guests, I trow, who will not, or dare not, eat at your own table with your friends. I take your offer gladly, sir, and shall speedily put you in mind thereof."

"Roger, I have said nothing," whispered Mistress Margaret, terrified at the old Puritan's ambiguous words. "If thou hadst persons of quality here, my son, thou shouldest have told me. I knew nought thereof."

"Ah, mother, thy tongue hath undone us all,"

murmured Roger, sadly. Then turning to Master Burroughs, as they walked towards the door, he said: "I pray you, worthy sir, misjudge me not. Guilty in this matter I am not, though guilty I may seem to be. What blame you see fit to lay on me, I will meekly bear. If you think to bring ruin upon me, the Lord judge betwixt us. Mistress Alice will trust me."

Master Burroughs had controlled himself hitherto, with almost as painful an effort as Roger, but his anger burst out at last over the apparently trivial business of mounting his horse.

"Women be all fools alike," he exclaimed testily, "as unreasonable as this horse here. Sirrah, wilt stand still? Hold his head, thou varlet, or I will break thine for thee. Now, girl, art thou ready? Hark you, Master Roger, a wise man trusts not a woman. And when he acts a double part, he maketh sure that he hath an audience which may be easily gulled."

And with this parting thrust Master Burroughs, having conquered his horse, and seen Alice bestowed safely behind him, set off at a heavy trot, and Roger, as his guests disappeared down the street, heaved a sigh of intense relief.

CHAPTER XII.

A NIGHT WATCH.

BUT the respite was short. Roger knew that not a moment was to be lost. His dangerous visitors must go at once. A few hours more, and Master Burroughs might examine the house from garret to cellar, without let or hindrance from any of the inmates, but what was there not to do in those few hours? Instead of returning to Mote End, the old Puritan might make direct for the sheriff's office, and come back with a warrant for searching the house, and a whole posse of men at his heels to carry it into execution. Whether he would do so or not depended on the information he had been able to obtain from the lady of the house.

Roger brought Mistress Margaret into the wainscotted room, where they were least likely to be disturbed, and began to question her closely. But he could find out little from her. Dearly as he loved his mother, he was always clumsy in dealing with her, and he made matters worse now by frightening her. Earnestly she declared that she had said no more than good breeding required.

"I have done no wrong, Roger, that thou shouldest be so stern with me," she protested, plaintively. "When a man maketh courteous inquiry of you touching your family, and a man, to boot, who hath never shown over much civility to you before, how can one choose but answer? Wouldest have me, thou with thy strict Puritan ways, give him the lie, and say that I knew not where Walter was? Or art thou peradventure ashamed of thy brother?"

"Nay, mother, nay," returned Roger. "Thou knowest I would deal honestly with all men. Only, at this dangerous time, I would have some slight reserve in our

talk. As touching Master Burroughs, I doubt not that he knew before he came hither that Walter was in the house."

Mistress Margaret raised her hands in horror. "Roger, how canst thou say such things? How should he know, and yet ask where he was?"

"He must answer that to his own conscience, mother. From his looks I can certainly affirm that he knew."

"If he knew," pursued Mistress Margaret, "there needed not to ply me with questions. Nay, Roger, he came as a friend, to ask how thy brother did, and discovered to me a true liking^d for the poor lad, which I had never seen in him before. But thou—thou wilt never show thyself friendly to Walter. E'en now, when he is in danger of his life, as Master Burroughs saith, thou wilt not so much as speak to him. Fie, my son! Must the mother that bare you both plead with thee to love him?"

"Methinks, mother, I prove my love to him by risking my life on his behalf. But no more of that. Since Master Burroughs plied thee with questions, prithee tell me what more didst thou say? Didst disclose anything further?"

"Ah, now thy brows are knit, and thou art stern and hard again," cried Mistress Margaret, bursting into tears. "'Tis thy father's look, when he went about to blame anyone. Only not me—he never chid me. But thou art bold to take me to task, Roger. Hast thou no reverence for thy mother? Whatever she doth should be right in thine eyes."

"Dear mother, I chide thee not," said Roger, half beside himself with anxiety. "I would only know of thee what thou hast said to Master Burroughs, that, if thou hast revealed aught he should not know, we may beware of danger."

"Danger! thou art always prating of danger, thou and the Puritan too, forsooth. Prithee, what danger is there? Can any blame us if we shelter thine own brother and thy dearest friend? Could we turn them away, when they prayed us to help them?"

"Didst tell him," asked Roger, quickly, "that Ralph Wentworth was here?"

"Ay, I told him," answered Mistress Sparowe. "That news assuredly he knew not before, for he seemed greatly amazed when he heard it. He was silent thereafter for a while. But that which touched him most nearly was when I made mention of that foolish young serving lad Ralph had brought with him. He asked many questions concerning him, why I know not, and hinted that he was a Cavalier in disguise. I told him no, forthwith. As if one of us would disfigure himself after that fashion, and crop his hair like a fanatic!"

The result of Roger's conversation with his mother was a request, instantly dispatched through Joan, that Ralph Wentworth would come down and speak with him. The Cavalier promptly went to Roger in the wainscotted room. He was thankful to escape from the dreary loft, where he and his companions had spent the greater part of the day, pacing restlessly to and fro. Roger frankly told him every circumstance of the visit he had just received, not omitting the luckless appearance of one of the refugees at the chapel window. Wentworth admitted that it was an imprudent act.

"The King is heedless," he said, "many a time have I prayed his Majesty to suffer Walter or me to keep watch at that window. But he groweth restless at the long confinement, and would fain see for himself if help is at hand. In sooth I wonder not at it. We are all weary of our idle life."

"None can more earnestly desire to see it ended than myself," said Roger, with a sigh.

Wentworth looked at him sadly. "Ay, I do ill to complain, when thou bearest it so bravely. Thou hast as much as any of us to lose by delay; alas, that we have brought thee to it! But concerning the King's face at the window. Was he recognized, think you?"

"He was not," answered Roger. "That I can most truly affirm. Trouble not thyself on that score, Ralph. I spake of it only to make thee more heedful in time to come."

"Ay, but women will prate," returned Wentworth, uneasily. "What if the lady speak thereof to her father? He might know his Majesty from her description only. Canst thou answer for her?"

"With mine own life," replied Roger, shortly. "Now to advise with thee about this ship—for in flight lies your only safety. Ye must depart forthwith; I can shield you no longer."

"All is planned for to-night," answered Wentworth, "and the tide will not suffer us to go sooner. The hour is late, and before to-morrow even Master Burroughs will scarce do anything against us. Doth not his home lie full six miles from here?"

"Ay, if he return straightway, and goeth not first to lodge an information against us at the Borough Court."

"And even then," argued Wentworth, "they will scarce search the house to-night upon such scant knowledge as they have. They will come to-morrow, as soon as they can bring the men together. We have twelve hours yet."

"Then before the morning thou must be gone, thou and thy company. Dost mark me, Ralph? 'Tis the first time, surely, that Sparowe telleth Wentworth to be gone."

"'Tis not the first time that Sparowe shieldeth Wentworth with his own life," answered the other. "Thou hast nought to reproach thyself with, Roger. Never, surely, had Wentworth a friend like to this Sparowe. Never Wentworth or any other man had so heavy a debt of gratitude to pay."

"Enough of such talk," returned Roger, almost impatiently, "Now tell me concerning the ship, for I am forced to ask, though most unwillingly. How and when think ye to escape?"

Wentworth proceeded to explain the arrangements which had been made for the flight. The ship was to come up the river as far as possible, with the high tide at midnight, and to dispatch a small boat to take the passengers off. The boat was to wait for them under the shadow of Stoke Bridge, where there was a small

landing stage; the signal, a white light run up twice to the mast head of the vessel, on seeing which the travellers were immediately to leave the house, and make for the river. Wind and tide permitting, they hoped within an hour to be on board, and in thirty-six hours, at latest, the skipper had undertaken to land them in Holland.

"Prithee, Ralph," said Roger, after Wentworth had detailed the scheme, "whence hast thou this news? How hath it been contrived, seeing ye have not left the house since ye came?"

"There needs not for any of us to leave the house," said Wentworth, shrugging his shoulders.

"Who is it, then, in this godly town of Ipswich," asked Roger, "who bringeth you intelligence?"

"Those of whom thou wouldest scarce like to hear," said Wentworth, with a strange look. "Ask me not, unless thou wouldest have thy mind disturbed afresh."

"Nay, but I desire to know," urged Roger. "There needs no further secrecy or concealment between us. Thou goest hence now, and it may be I shall not see thee for years. Methinks, ere thou depart, I have a right to know."

Wentworth shook his head. "If thou doth force me to tell thee, thou wilt regret it. Seek not to know, Roger. Others are concerned besides myself."

"Walter!" exclaimed Roger, starting. "Nay, now thou shalt speak, Ralph. What hath my unhappy brother done? What further plottings hath he engaged in?"

"None which thou dost not already know of or suspect. Since I am compelled to speak, 'tis the Reverend Mr. Sturges who hath been our chief purveyor of news. Thou knowest him?"

"Mr. Sturges!" said Roger, thunderstruck. "Ay, I know him. Fool that I was not to have thought of him before! Such an office befits him better than his post among these misguided people."

"Walter hath of necessity told me of the strange chance whereby ye both lighted upon him," said Wentworth, "else had I not spoken."

"And hath he in truth devised and carried out this well-conceived plan?" asked Roger.

"He and others, whose very names I know not. Those who help us concern me little. Enough that the safety of the King hath been entrusted to me. So I do but bring him out of these dangers, and deliver him safe and sound to my Lord Wilmot, I care not who hath a hand in it."

"But," persisted Roger, "have ye no go-between? Since ye came hither, I know of my certain knowledge that Master Sturges hath been from home. Some messenger must have come to and fro."

Wentworth hesitated. "Someone hath been here to bring us news, but I care not to speak of it. 'Twill but raise thine anger. All is now planned; the messenger will not come again, and wherefore shouldst thou seek to know?"

"Because of Walter," returned Roger, doggedly. "What hath he done? What hand hath he had in the business?"

"Briefly, then, it is the woman thou wottest of, concerning whom thou and Walter have quarrelled, who cometh hither with news of the ship. Nay, bend not thy brows so fiercely on me. Thou wouldest know, and now what hast thou gained thereby? Only that which will widen the breach between you."

"He seeth her still?" asked Roger, catching his breath. "This unholy familiarity between them is not at an end?"

"Nay, of that I know nought," answered Wentworth, shrugging his shoulders. "Methinks we have all of us too much at stake to spend our time in dallying with a woman. But Walter is of age to see to his own concerns."

"Ralph, thou mightest help me," said Roger, in an imploring tone. "Thou mightest make him see that 'tis his duty to marry her."

"To marry her! The Saints forbid!" exclaimed Wentworth, with a laugh. "That were helping neither him nor thee. Roger, thou art beside thyself. Wouldest

have every young man marry the first woman he looks upon ? ”

“ I would have him act rightly towards her. Walter hath done this woman sore wrong ” . . .

“ Thy Puritan ways are inconceivable,” interrupted Ralph. “ As for me, my business lieth with the King, and any who bring news which may help to convey him hence, are welcome to me.”

At this moment the door opened, and Walter himself lounged into the room. Ever since he had shot up suddenly to man’s stature, this easy, careless gait had been characteristic of him, and now it was almost the only mark left of the blythe young fellow, whose cheerful presence used to brighten the Old House. The strain of the last month had told fearfully upon him. The first sight of war and bloodshed, the terrible anxiety of piloting Charles half across England, the physical fatigues and hardships he had undergone, and the dread of discovery and death, had crushed his light-hearted boyish nature. He was old and haggard, his mouth and forehead were lined with care, and his large dreamy eyes had a fierce look in them, like those of a hunted animal.

Nothing showed more plainly the unnatural tension of the last few days, than the agitated way in which Roger and Wentworth sprang to their feet at his entrance. Wentworth hurried towards him, and laid his hand on his arm.

“ No news, none ! ” he explained, shaking himself free. “ Nothing hath been altered. I came only to have a few moments speech of thee, Roger, before we part, it may be for ever. Nay, Ralph,” as Wentworth moved to leave the room, “ prithee, stay. Thou hast weight with Roger. Thou mayest perchance be of use to me in that I have to say.”

Wentworth reluctantly sat down, and Roger asked, coldly, “ Thou goest also, Walter ? Wherefore hast thou not told me ? ”

“ I come to tell thee now, Roger, and to bid thee farewell. The time will be short for leaves-taking

to-night. The King will have it so. His Majesty in the nobleness of his heart, hath refused to leave me behind."

"I am glad," replied Roger, in the same cold tone. "I could not shield thee longer. Nay, as I have told Ralph, my power to help you all is gone. Ye cannot be here another day in safety."

"Then, brother, ere we go, bid me God speed," said Walter, suddenly holding out his hands. "Let us not part in anger. It is hard for one who carries his life in his hands to be burdened with a brother's hate."

"I hate thee not, Walter, I hate thy sin only. The Lord grant thee the grace of repentance. Repair thy sin, and I pledge thee my word as a Christian, all shall be between us as heretofore."

Walter shook his head. "I cannot do as thou biddest me," he said, sorrowfully. "I cannot repair my sin in the way thou wilt have it. It is impossible. Tell him, Ralph. Prithee, show him that mine honour as a gentleman forbids it me."

"Be reasonable, Roger," interposed Wentworth. "Thou canst see for thyself that Walter must not marry this buxom damsel. The thing suits not a man of our quality. Consider the honour of thine ancient house."

"There is no dishonour, but sin," answered Roger, stubbornly. "I marvel, Walter, that thou darest to draw Ralph into this family difference. 'Tis a matter betwixt thee and me, and I trow it may be settled without recourse had to others."

"Ay, if thou wilt settle it," answered Walter. "But methought Ralph, who hath known us so long, would help to move thee to peace. Once more, I ask, Roger, wilt thou pardon me, and receive me back to brotherly harmony and love, without forcing me to do that which is impossible?"

"No, by my soul's salvation, no!" exclaimed Roger, "If thou canst not atone for thy sin, neither can I forgive thee."

"Any other atonement" . . . began Walter.

"There is no other. Make restitution to her for her

honour which thou hast taken from her, or thou shalt never see my face again?"

"Roger, be not so hard with thy brother," pleaded Wentworth. "Thou dost wrong to drive him from thee at such a time. Canst not forgive, without enacting a price for thy forgiveness which he dares not pay? To-morrow the lad will be in exile, it may be for years. Let him not go forth with thy curse upon him."

"'Tis not my curse, but the Lord's," answered Roger bitterly. "'The wages of sin is death.' Let him turn unto the Lord, and repent him, and my forgiveness shall not be lacking. But of what avail to speak of repentance," he went on, turning to Walter, "least of all when, as I hear, thou hast dared to affront me by bringing this woman into my very house?"

"I have not brought her," faltered Walter. "She cometh as a messenger in the service of the King. I have had no speech of her. The business hath passed between Ralph and—and Master Sturges. Chide me not," he entreated, as Roger's brow darkened again at the mention of the priest's hated name. "Roger, we stand both of us in peril of death. Must we part unreconciled? Can no prayer of mine avail to move thee?"

There was a moment's dead silence. Walter fixed his eyes eagerly on his brother, and held out his hand. Then his look of anxious expectation faded slowly. He shrank back, his hand fell, and turning sadly away he went out of the room so softly that the door had closed upon him, before Wentworth and Roger had realised that he was gone.

Wentworth drew a deep breath. "Pray God, thou do not repent of thy hardness," he said, "and that the lad be not driven to evil courses in foreign parts. Thou art a strange man, Roger. So true towards me, so gentle and forbearing with the other guest whom thou canst not love—and towards thy brother so unyielding. Alas! Would to God that we were quit of this business, and safe, all three of us, on the other side of the water!"

Wentworth's wish found an echo from more than one heart that night. It was deemed prudent not to tell Mistress Margaret of the plan of escape. She went to bed perfectly satisfied with herself, the little temporary vexation at the trap Master Burroughs had laid for her quite forgotten, and happily unconscious that, if all went well, the fugitives, and Walter among them, would have left the house before the next morning. Roger, however, was far too anxious to rest. The servants were dismissed, and the house secured as usual. It had been arranged that, as soon as the light was seen, the travellers were to slip out by the small side entrance in the rear of the wainscotted room; and Roger, not daring to leave the door open, carried the key of it with him, instead of laying it up in his chamber with the others.

Hour after hour he paced the room, the door open to the great hall, that he might hear the cry of the watchman in the street. Wentworth stole down once, when the household had retired, to satisfy himself that all was well, then crept upstairs again to the chapel, where Charles and Walter were intently watching for the signal light, and Roger was once more alone.

It was a marvellously beautiful night, so warm and balmy, that the young man after a time felt the house unbearably hot, opened the lattice window, and stepped out into the garden. The full moon shone with almost the brilliance of day, and the shadows of the trees fell across the path like black bars upon a sheet of silver. Now and again a bird stirred in the branches, and broke the magic stillness of the autumn night with a dreamy chirp. The town itself was hushed into absolute silence, scarcely interrupted by the hoarse cry of the watchman announcing the hour, and exhorting the faithful to pray for the departing soul.

Peace and quietness were everywhere, save in Roger's distracted brain. Neither in the house nor in the garden could he rest. He tried in vain to think collectedly. Alice, her father, Walter, the danger, the projected escape, all the confused events of that anxious day grew more confused in the retrospect. He had no



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THE CHAPEL.

more power over his thoughts than if he were asleep. His brain seemed to act independently, and to thrust one ruling idea always before him, his harshness to Walter.

Again and again his brother's haggard face and wistful eyes rose before him, and again and again he tried to feel that he had done well to be angry. But it was of no avail. Here in this room—he had wandered in again from the garden—where they had played as children, where every nook and corner was associated with some boyish memory; here in the solemn silence of the night, Roger knew at last that he had been hard and stern. He had condemned the sinner as well as the sin. He had not forgiven as he hoped to be forgiven. But even now it was not too late. Walter was still here, and it would go hard with Roger if he could not find some moment, even in the hurry of parting, to take him aside, and whisper a word of reconciliation.

What was that? Roger was startled by the cry of the watchman: "Past one o'clock, and a moonlight night!" A whole hour then had passed since the time fixed for the start, and yet he heard no movement from above. He stepped again into the garden, and looked up at the chapel gable. There was no light in it, but the moon was streaming in at the little window, and in the deep shadow it cast Roger thought he distinguished two heads, and a pale gleam from Walter's bright curls.

Two o'clock came, and still no sound but the watchman's cry broke the silence. The stillness became irksome, then terribly oppressive, till Roger felt as if the lightest noise would be a relief. At last he stole up to the loft, more to quiet his strained nerves with the comforting sound of a human voice, than with any hope of learning the cause of the delay, which he knew the watchers above could no more explain than he.

The little chapel was flooded with the moonbeams, and all the arches and pillars shone out in the ghostly light. Wentworth sprang up to meet him the moment he entered.

"What news dost thou bring us, Roger? What hath caused the delay? Speak, man, and tell us." And as he asked, he laid his trembling hand on Roger's arm.

"Friend, you are most welcome," said another voice out of the darkness, and Charles rose, and came forward from an arched recess, where a few cloaks had been thrown down to make a rough bed for him. "I pray you tell us briefly, if you can, whether anything hath happened to the boat."

"Alas, sir, I know no more than you," answered Roger. "I have heard nothing. I came hither only to have speech of some fellow-creature, hoping perchance you yourselves might know if there were any change of plan. Down there it is as lonely as the grave, and I tremble at mine own shadow."

"And up here we sit and sigh like owls in the night," returned Charles. "Indeed, sir, an you be dismal, you come not to over cheerful company. Faith, I had as lief be in Scotland, as in this gruesome place."

"Beseech your Majesty to be patient," answered Wentworth, earnestly. "The signal cannot fail to be seen presently. I was assured that the plan could not miscarry this time. Canst thou not see the light, Walter?"

"There is no light," answered Walter, from the window. "The river lieth mostly in shadow, and it is dark as death."

"Some mistake hath doubtless arisen," said Roger, "in spite of what thou sayest, Ralph. Shall I go down to the river and see?"

Wentworth shook his head. "Too dangerous for thee, Roger, but what saith his Majesty?"

"We will not trouble you so far, Master Sparowe," answered Charles, courteously, "We owe you too many thanks for your present care of us, to suffer you to jeopardize your life further. Neither is it safe for one well-known as you are to be about the town at night. 'Twould cause fresh suspicion."

"What can we do then?" cried Wentworth, in a tone of despair.

"Why wait, man, as we have waited any time these three weeks, and keep a brave heart," returned Charles, with imperturbable good humour. "Methinks 'tis a

lesson thou hast had opportunity enough to learn, Ralph, ere now. Nay, look not so downcast. Have we slipped so often through Sultan Oliver's fingers, to lose courage now, because a signal light is delayed for an hour. Out upou thee, friend! Wilmot, now, had been of stouter heart."

"Tis my anxiety for your majesty which causeth me to be thus faint-spirited," returned Wentworth. "For myself I care not, but I cannot forget that 'twas to my charge that my Lord Wilmot trusted you."

"Wilmot is a good fellow, an excellent fellow," replied Charles, "and hath a greater love for my poor self than it deserves. Nevertheless he is foolish in some things. What think you, Master Sparowe, of a man who goeth about the country in danger of his life, and will wear no disguise, because he saith it becomes him not? Gentlemen, an I had stayed to think of what became me, I had not kept a head, ugly or handsome, on my shoulders."

Somewhat rueful as this sally sounded in the dead stillness of the night, it raised a little laugh, which did every one good, and helped to keep up the spirits of the forlorn company. But when the September dawn came in at the chapel window, even Charles, sanguine as he was, could not but admit that the enterprise had failed.

The prospect before them was now desperate. Hope of escape was remote, and the danger immediate, as Roger warned them when he came up for a second consultation. For it would be impossible for the fugitives to remain in the house through the day, even if the tide would serve to carry out the plan the next night. The town was a very stronghold of Puritanism, and it needed but a whisper from Master Burroughs to bring an angry mob about their ears. Besides, they had no reason to suppose that the arrangements, which had not taken effect once, could be successfully carried out a second time. Before any decision could be arrived at, it was imperatively necessary to learn the reason of the failure, and whether it was due to any discovery which would oblige them to leave Ipswich at once.

"Someone must go forthwith to the river, and have

news of the boat," said Wentworth. "But whom shall we send? None of us dare stir, and thou, Roger, art scarcely less suspect."

"And why not Father Martin?" asked Walter from the window.

"Well said, Master Walter. Father Martin let it be," replied Charles. "But how to convey news of our straits to him, and bring him hither, without raising suspicion?"

"That shall be seen to," replied Wentworth. "Thou Roger, must help in this matter, for love of me. 'Tis the last service I will ask of thee."

"I leave it to your wise consideration," said Charles, yawning. "For in good sooth, gentlemen, my head is so greatly wearied with the night's work that I can scarce keep awake. I would give my chance of the three kingdoms—small enough at this moment, I trow—for half-an-hour's sleep."

Wentworth looked anxiously at him. "Your Majesty is overworn," he said. "Sleep you must have, sir, or your strength will fail at the critical moment. And since we must wait an hour or more for news, use it, I beseech you, to take rest, while Walter and I keep watch. The couch is rough, and we dare not go below, but if you could accommodate yourself to it, sir" . . .

"I need no beseeching, good Ralph. How thou art not thyself, and Walter too, wearied to death, passeth my comprehension. Never was softer bed to a tired man," he continued, as he flung himself down. "If news come, and I am needed, call me."

And the next minute, in spite of the tremendous issues of life and death hanging over him, the wanderer had forgotten all his cares and troubles, and was sleeping as peacefully as a child. He slept on while a carefully-worded note was dispatched to Master Sturges; slept while the sun rose higher, and broad daylight awoke the household, and the business of daily life began, within doors and without. Wentworth would not wake him even when Joan appeared, laden with a substantial breakfast, and regaled the fugitives, while

she served them, with a whole budget of town gossip she had already picked up at the house door. Not until, some three hours later, Master Sturges came hurrying up the narrow oaken stairs, and across the loft, at such unusual speed that he almost fell headlong down the steps which led to the chapel, did Wentworth think it necessary to rouse the tired sleeper.

Master Sturges, or Father Martin rather, for he doffed his cap and his false beard, and entered the chapel as the smooth-shaven Catholic priest, was breathless with haste and agitation. Drops of sweat stood on his forehead, his face was purple, and for a moment he could not speak for excitement.

"Foiled!" he exclaimed at last, stamping his foot on the ground. "Foiled! and by a woman!"

"A woman! How? what mean you?" exclaimed Walter and Ralph together; and Charles, rising from the ground, broad awake in a moment, came forward and said more quietly, "Take breath first, father, and then declare your tidings."

"A woman, sir, hath wrought this mischief, alas! The most pitiful, paltry jade, to whose apron strings a king's ransom was ever tied. I almost shame to tell the tale."

"Out with it, father," replied Charles. "Ill news is never the better for keeping. 'Twill not be the first time, nor the last either, that a man's life hath hung upon a woman's whim."

"But how hath a woman got wind of this business at all?" asked Wentworth. "Have we been betrayed by any in the house? Surely not thy mother, Walter."

"Never!" answered Walter, vehemently. "And she knoweth nought of the escape."

"None have betrayed us so far," answered Father Martin. "'Tis the wife of the skipper who hath foiled the plan. This wretched creature, having some hint of her husband's doings, and marvelling that he should go to sea again so soon, when he was but just returned, began to suspect that he had a treaty with the other side, for which his head, and her's too, might have to pay. Nought to him saith she of her doubts, which

had put both him and us on our guard. But about an hour before midnight last night as he was in his chamber preparing to start, she claps to the door, and fastens it on him, and holdeth him close prisoner. And the man, finding himself thus bested, and not daring to make much stir—for she swore that if he forced the door, she would go forthwith to the town council, and lay an information against him, that he was carrying two Royalists over to Holland—could no other than abide quietly till she let him forth. Which she did at eight of the clock this morning, when all chance of going was at end. I have at this moment had speech of the man. He is yet willing, he saith, to carry out his bargain, an he can be rid of his wife, but the tide will not serve for a week.”

“A week!” echoed the three eager listeners.

“A week! ’tis impossible,” said Wentworth. “In three days time, sir, you must be quit of this ungrateful country.”

“A week will not help us, father,” said Charles, shaking his head.

“Ay, so I thought, my liege, and therefore I took upon me to tell him the bargain was at an end, and he poorer by a round sum of money than he might have been. Whereat he grumbled and cursed his wife. And hither have I come as fast as feet would carry me, to advise with you all touching the grave peril wherein the King doth stand.”

CHAPTER XIII.

THE ESCAPE.

It was now plain that nothing but instant flight would save the whole party. Suspicion against them was evidently rife throughout the town, and Master Burroughs' visit was rather the outcome, than the cause of it. It was impossible to tell from what quarter the danger would come. At any moment the house might be invaded by a search party of soldiers, or by what was still more alarming, a fanatical Puritan mob. There was a moment's hasty consultation, whether it might not be well for the fugitives to remain in the house, and conceal themselves in the secret chamber, rather than risk a flight in broad daylight across the open country. The hiding place was large enough to contain two.

"And for myself I do not fear," said Walter, who had suggested the plan. "My brother's name, and mine own, will shelter me. We have been here so long; the townsfolk will not dare to attack a Sparowe, even though he be one of the Malignants, as they call us. And your Majesty and Ralph will be safe in the secret chamber."

"Ay, but the food," objected Ralph. "If they occupy the house, as they may do for a time, they will starve us out. The open country, methinks, is safer."

"The open country it shall be," decided Charles. "Walter, your noble spirit doth honour to your ancient name and lineage, but your courage shall not be thus severely tested. And as touching your brother's hospitality, which I made free to take unasked, methinks I have used it longer than befits a gentleman. He shall not shelter us another day at such imminent risk."

"Walter raised Charles' hand to his lips. "Would Roger could hear you, my liege! Albeit he is a Puritan, 'twould be the proudest moment of his life. But for any

poor service I may have done you, I beseech you, speak not of it. My heart's blood were not too heavy a price to pay for your Majesty's safety. And I have done little; Ralph hath borne the burden of the flight."

"I am greatly beholden to you both," said Charles, graciously. "Ye have acted as true and loyal servants of the Crown. Though, methinks, 'tis small service to save so worthless a neck from the block to which, after all, it may chance to come at last."

"Prithee, sir," quoth Wentworth, almost impatiently, "cease this talk, and consider, I beseech you, our means of flight. And thou, Walter, shouldest know better than to fool away the precious time in idle speeches. Every moment's delay may cost us our lives. Since your Majesty desires to escape across the country,—and I think myself that 'tis the safer course, while the way is open—how shall we leave the house?"

It was quickly decided that they should start by the small postern gate leading from the alcove, the same which should have witnessed their flight last night. They agreed to take nothing with them but their arms, and such provisions as they could carry, and Mistress Margaret could provide at a moment's notice. The preparations for the journey were soon made. Charles had long since parted with all his ornaments, his watch, and the jewelled George bequeathed him by his father. The clothes in which he had come had hitherto proved a sufficient disguise, and in order to carry out effectually the character of humble serving man, he thrust his delicate hands up the chimney of the attic, and blackened his face with the soot.

"And which am I now, father, so please you to tell me, king or groom?" he asked, gaily, catching sight of Father Martin's horror-stricken face at the moment of transformation. "Did ever your eyes behold so unkingly a spectacle? An the villains take me, they will let me go again, as scarce worth the killing."

"To see your Majesty thus, I who have been in your royal father's service, and have known you from a child!" wept Father Martin, throwing himself on his

knees and trying to seize Charles' hand, and kiss it; but Wentworth put him roughly back.

"Stand up, sir priest, and show your love for the King by helping, not by hindering his flight. Now, if you are ready, sir . . . your cloak . . . your cap" . . .

As he spoke, Walter flung a short cloak, stained with grease and dust, over the King's doublet, and fastened it at the throat with a ragged string.

"Oh, if Wilmot could but see me!" said Charles, laughing till the tears ran down his grimy cheeks. "But no, he were too fine a gentleman to recognise me now. Know you, Father, that he will not consent to wear any disguise?"

Meanwhile Roger downstairs was making a sorry feint to eat his breakfast, and to parry Mistress Margaret's ceaseless questions about the cause of his pale face and agitated looks. So difficult was the task, that he hailed, as a positive relief, the news that the fugitives were making preparations to start immediately. Longer concealment being now impossible, the announcement was openly made, and Roger was able to explain the cause of his anxiety. Mistress Margaret's astonishment and dismay were unbounded.

"But oh, Roger!" she exclaimed, cutting him suddenly short, "they will not surely take Walter with them. There is no need that the boy should go, when he is but just returned. He hath had fatigue enough since the battle, and needeth rest."

"Rest, mother," said Roger, with a sad smile, "and what rest, thinkest thou, will he have here? Nay, Walter goeth too, as I have understood. In sooth, this house is no place for him. 'Tis safer far that he should leave England."

Mistress Margaret raised her hands in horror. "Leave England? Thou wilt send him into a foreign land? Never, Roger, never! Thou shalt not part us in this manner. Thou canst shelter him here, if thou wilt; thine own good name, and mine, will avail. They cannot lay a finger on him."

"Mother, thou dost forget," said Roger, shaking his

head sorrowfully, "Thou art thyself a Royalist, and therefore suspect. I shall have some ado, I fear me, to keep thee scatheless!"

"Me!" exclaimed Mistress Margaret, indignantly. "Dost think they will dare to touch me, who have lived here so long without a word spoken against me? Roger, trouble hath turned thy brain."

"The Lord grant thy words be true! Meanwhile thou must consent to part from Walter for a time, until these troubles be past. And then—I pledge thee my word thou shalt have him back in safety, and we will all live together in peace."

At this moment a serving man brought Roger word that a woman desired to speak with him in the great hall. In his official capacity Roger was constantly liable to these interruptions. He was too well used to them to be alarmed at the present summons. He hailed it rather as a diversion, and pushing away his untasted breakfast, he went out at once into the hall. At the foot of the great oaken staircase, where she seemed to have dropped through sheer weariness, lay a woman huddled in an old cloak. Her breath came in great laboured sobs, and she seemed so utterly exhausted, that she did not move, when the door swung behind Roger. He came towards her and touched her gently.

"What is there I can do for thee, my good woman?" he asked at last.

The woman sprang to her feet, and as her cloak fell back, Roger saw the coarse handsome features, and buxom figure, which had haunted him ever since his first sight of them in the inn at Colchester. But the rounded cheeks were now sunken and pale, the red lips trembled, and the woman's bold black eyes had such a look of terror in them, that Roger shrank back appalled. Involuntarily he put out his hand.

"Thou here, thou ill-fated woman!" he exclaimed. "What evil destiny hath brought thee hither? How hast thou dared to come, and thrust thyself under the same roof as my mother? She will be here anon, she will see thee! Get thee gone at once."

The woman sank on the ground, and clasped Roger's knees. "Hear me, sweet, sir, for the love of heaven, ere you drive me away. I have come from Colchester since break of day, running well nigh every step of the way" . .

"And wherefore?" asked Roger, coldly, as the woman paused to take breath.

"To warn you, you and your brother, and those whom ye shelter here, that ye are all in danger of death," she cried. "Oh, if your honour would but give heed to what I say. They must fly at once, this very hour, for their lives."

Roger paused. Left to himself, he would not have hesitated an instant to put the woman out of the house. The news she brought might be merely a device to gain admission. But suddenly he remembered that Wentworth, the day before, had confessed that this woman brought them secret intelligence, and had been trusted with the delicate negotiations about the boat. Shrinking involuntarily from contact with her, he nevertheless forced himself to look her steadily in the face as he asked: "From whence hast thou this news? And who hath told thee that I shelter any here?"

"I have been sent hither, and have had speech of your honour's friend, and of Master Sturges," she answered. "I had thought your honour knew thereof. And, oh, sir," she continued, clasping her hands, "an you will not believe me yourself, let me go to them, I beseech you. They will give credence to my words."

"Tell me first from whence thou hast the news."

"Roger," interrupted Mistress Margaret's silvery voice, from the door of the sitting room, "bid the poor creature come in here. She is breathless and weary, and will be glad to rest. And speak gently to her, my son. Thou art not wont to be so rough and churlish."

"Mother, go back, I beseech thee, I command thee!" cried Roger, imperiously. "The hall is good enough for her. She shall not come in thither. That which she hath to say, she shall say it here."

The woman wrung her hands. "Good sir, sweet madam, so you do but hear, I care not where I speak.

For while we parley, the soldiers are already on the road."

"The soldiers!" shrieked Mistress Margaret.

"Ay, the soldiers. For the love of the dear Christ, listen to me. A party of the Parliament men lay at our inn last night, and as I served them, I marked how they let fall the name of Sparowe. Whereat I gave good heed, as your honour may conceive, and heard them presently say that they would come here at six of the clock this morning, would surround the house that none might escape, and seize the King of Scots, having certain intelligence that he is in hiding here. I sought to get from the house and come hither last night, but could not do it, the men not suffering me to depart. But this morning I slipped away before break of day."

During this speech Mistress Margaret had stood gazing at the woman with a look of growing horror. Suddenly she sprang forward, and seized Roger by the arm.

"Roger, come from her," she cried. "Thou dost well not to have her in the house. She is distraught, the poor creature, and raveth of the King. Neither King of Scots nor King of England is in hiding here."

Roger shook off his mother's hand, and pointed up the stairs. "Thou knowest where they are," he said, hastily, to the woman. "Up thither as fast as feet can carry thee, and bid them come at once. There is no other way of escape now, save through the passage."

As the woman sped up to the attic, Roger turned to his mother, and taking both her hands in his, he said, gently: "Mother, be calm. Make not the work harder for us all, I beseech thee. We thought to have spared thee, but now thou must hear all. The Lord grant thee strength to bear it!"

Mistress Margaret looked at him in terror, and tried to withdraw her hands.

"What is there to know, Roger?" she asked. "What further secrets hast thou kept from me? Here is thy friend, Ralph Wentworth, whom I have small cause to love, and his serving man. Saving these, and thine own brother, there are none in the house, I will take

my oath on't. Or are there others," she added, fiercely, "of whom I know not?"

"None others," answered Roger. "Thou hast seen and spoken with him they call the King of Scots. 'Tis the young serving man, Will Somers. For his sake, Walter, and Ralph Wentworth, and I also, it may be, have risked our lives."

Roger tried to speak quietly, hoping to calm his mother by his own composure. Mistress Margaret looked doubtfully at him for a moment, then burst into an hysterical laugh.

"Fie upon thee, Roger, to make such a fool of me! Dost hope to trick me thus? Or hast thou so mean an opinion of his Majesty the King, as to think he would demean himself after such a fashion? Will Somers, forsooth, with his cropped hair and dirty clothes! Will Somers, the King!"

"The same, fair lady. Charles Stuart and Will Somers are one and the same person, and at your service, madam," said a voice behind her. "'Tis a small matter that you know me not; i' faith, sometimes I scarce know myself. As witness in this present guise, for the which I pray you to excuse me."

Mistress Margaret turned, and beheld a tattered figure, dirty beyond recognition. The eyes alone, bright, sparkling, and even at this moment of supreme peril, dancing with momentary amusement, betrayed the speaker. She shrank back in consternation.

"Sir . . . Will Somers! . . . His Majesty!" . . . she stammered.

"Any or all of them," replied Charles, urbanely. "Nay, madam," for Mistress Margaret burst into tears, and flinging herself on her knees, tried to seize his hand and kiss it, "I entreat you, forbear. This hand hath lately made too intimate acquaintance with the chimney, to be worthy of a lady's fair lips. When a man's neck is in danger, he is not over nice concerning his appearance. It is I rather who should kneel and kiss your hand, and thank you for the generous shelter granted to poor Will Somers."

While this little scene was in progress, the Reverend Mr. Sturges glided down the stairs in the rear of the party. Amid the turmoil and confusion, the sight of his black cassock, and broad, stiffly-starched collar and band, his solemn gait and imperturbable face, was absolutely soothing. Nothing could be more admirably in keeping than his low greeting, half whine, half snuffle, as he passed Roger on his way to the door: "Good day to you, my son. The Lord be with you!" For the first time in his life, Roger felt a movement towards the man which was not wholly hatred. No one could tell what dangers might lie beyond the threshold he now crossed so sedately. At such a crisis, with death staring them all in the face, the young man could not sufficiently admire Master Sturges' invincible self-possession. And the priest's strength seemed to be communicated to others, by a kind of subtle sympathy. Roger tried to emulate him in the calmness with which he turned to the group in the hall, and joined in the hurried discussion.

Wentworth was as prompt as ever with his counsel.

"We must escape at once by the postern door. We thought to stay for such food as Mistress Margaret might be able to give us, but now we dare not wait. I beseech your Majesty to come at once. If we delay longer we may endanger the lives of all in the house."

"I come, Ralph, I come," returned Charles. "Master Sparowe, farewell. I dare not speak of that I owe you, but if ever" . . .

At this moment Roger held up his hand. Outside, in the street, they could hear the sound of many voices, and the tramp of feet, like the roar of a great multitude. The front door swung open, and Joan entered, a market basket on her arm. Pale and terrified, her kerchief ruffled, her dress in disorder, she rushed to Roger, and clutched his arm.

"Master, save me, save me," she cried. "The people be all coming hither, and they caught me, and hustled me, and broke mine eggs for me—see here! And they swore deep oaths that one named Charles Stuart, I think they called him, was here, and that he should

escape them no longer, but they would pull the house down about our ears to have him" . . .

Joan broke off with a shriek, as the great hall door swung to with a terrible clash behind her. Wentworth had sprung forward at her first words, closed the door, and hastily made it fast.

"That will give us five minutes' breathing time," he said, shortly. "Now sir, for our lives! There is nought but that door between us and destruction."

"By the secret way!" cried Roger. "There is none other now. The house is surrounded, and the postern gate will be watched."

"By that mouldy passage!" answered Charles. "Well, since there is no help, the saints grant we be not stifled in it."

"And wilt thou come and open to us, Roger?" said Walter, as they hurried off towards the wainscotted room, "or shall I stay behind to do it?"

"Nay, I will come," answered Roger, briefly. "Ho, you men there! Guard this door for five minutes for your lives. Let none pass save across your bodies. Here, Jock—Ben—Will Jones! Ye have been faithful to me, and to my father before me. Prove yourselves true men now, and stand by your master. 'Tis life and death with us."

"Ay, ay, your honour." And half-a-dozen men came rushing up from the buttery, and raised a shout as they gathered round Roger, hearing which the fast thickening crowd outside wavered for a moment.

"Now, mother" . . . but Mistress Margaret had swooned at all the horrors round her, the meaning of which she only half understood, and Joan rushed forward, barely in time to receive her in her arms, as she reeled and fell.

It was the work of a minute with Roger to loosen the wedge-shaped projection in the wainscotted room, which concealed the secret on which so many precious lives were hanging. But as he laid his hand on the spring, and tried to snap it, he became instantly aware that something was wrong. No whirring sound, no noiseless

sliding of well greased panels answered to his touch. He pressed the spring again and again with frantic efforts, but in vain; it refused to move.

"Walter's white face appeared at the cupboard door. "Brother, the panel; it opens not. Make haste with the spring there. Delay not, when every moment is precious."

"'Tis not I who delay, Walter," answered Roger, looking up, breathless and crimson with agitation, from the recess. "The spring is set fast. Some one hath tampered with it. Christ! it will not act!"

It was true. All their efforts to work the spring were unavailing, and when the young men tried by sheer force to thrust the panel back, without the spring to set it in motion, they found the task beyond their strength. So thoroughly had the artificer done his work, that the panel was as immovable as the rest of the wall, when the machinery to push it aside failed.

"By the postern gate, then, since the saints will have it so!" said Charles at last, as they desisted breathlessly from their efforts, and gathered round him with despair in their faces. "Marry, sirs, if we save our necks this time, we shall do well."

At this moment there was an awful roar from the front of the house. The great entrance had been burst open at last; and they could hear the tramp of many feet as the crowd rushed into the hall. Roger sprang up.

"I will go to them," he exclaimed. "My name hath still some weight. Peradventure they will listen to me for a few moments. I can at least hold them in check while ye escape through the postern."

And drawing his slight figure to its full height, he walked across the room, his head erect, his pale face calm and resolute, to face a mob ready, for aught he knew, to tear him to pieces.

Roger was not alone in his courage. Years after, he remembered how, as he left the room, he heard Walter say, in a strangely exulting voice: "Now, Ralph, speed. Our plan, our plan!" and for a moment Roger wondered

how his brother could speak cheerfully, or think of any plan at that supreme crisis.

The great hall was filled with people. Half of them scarcely knew what they had come for ; but as they had joined the crowd rushing to "Sparowe's house," they had caught up some vague notion that Malignants were in hiding there. Among a few of the more sober minded the report had circulated that the Man of Sin, Charles Stuart himself, was verily concealed in the house. These acted as guides to the mob, and contrived to press to the front ; and each zealous Puritan, as he felt for his pistol or stout bludgeon, determined to strike a blow for the Lord, and this time to put an end to the Mystery of Iniquity.

There was a moment's silence when Roger appeared, and asked in his usual quiet voice : "What would ye, my good sirs ?"

"'Tis Master Sparowe himself. We mean not to harm your honour. We know you for one of the godly."

"We come to deliver you from these Malignants, who have thrust themselves upon you at unawares," said another. "Give them up to us, or 'twill be the worse for you."

"Nay, he shall not be threatened," said one of the men, who spoke with an air of authority. "Hath he not served the good cause, and his father before him ? Look you, Master Sparowe, we seek not to do you mischief. Deliver up unto us the Man of Sin, Charles Stuart, who is in hiding here, perchance without your knowledge, and not a hair of your head shall be hurt."

"Firstly, good sirs, I desire to know your warrant for entering a peaceable man's house in this riotous manner. Know ye not that I have power to commit everyone of you for breach of the peace ?"

There was a pause. The foremost men in the crowd looked at each other, and seemed to hesitate. Roger took instant advantage of the opportunity. "Disperse yourselves quietly," he continued, "and go to your homes. Let some of your number come to me, and whatsoever ye ask in reason it shall be granted."

For one moment it appeared as if Roger's authority alone would be sufficient to avert the danger, when a voice at the back cried: "The sword of the Lord, and of Gideon! Brethren, this is the Lord's work. We have put our hands to the plough. Let us not draw back unto perdition."

"Down with the Man of Sin!" shouted half-a-dozen men. "Down with the Stuarts! Death to Charles Stuart!"

It was enough. The crowd rushed furiously forward again, and Roger was forced back to the foot of the stairs. Here he tried to make a stand, and raised his hand to entreat a hearing, but a respectably-dressed man close to him sprang on one of the steps, and pulled his arm down.

"'Twere better to yield him at once, sir," he said in his ear. "Give the Stuart up to us, and we will do you no violence. When our fellows here have him, they will disperse quietly. Otherwise—your blood be on your own head!"

"How know ye that he is here?" asked Roger, trying to parley.

"We have certain intelligence of it," answered the man. "Deny it not, at your peril."

"He is here," roared some of the crowd, catching a few words of the conversation. "He was here half-an-hour since, and he hath not escaped—the house is watched—trifle with us no longer. The Stuart! We will have the Stuart!" There was a horrible silence, as the dense mass surged resistlessly forward towards the inner door.

"Master Sparowe," cried a man in the crowd. "You were a Puritan until this day. Swear to us now that Charles Stuart is not here, and hath not been here, and we will believe you."

"Fool," interrupted another, "the godly swear not. Tell us, master, as thou art one of us, and hopest for salvation hereafter, that he is not with thee, and it will suffice us. In the name of the Lord, is Charles Stuart here or no?"

The speaker snatched a dagger from his belt, sprang

up the staircase, and held it over Roger's head as he spoke. Roger glanced up at the bright weapon, and at the face of deadly hatred above it.

"He is here!"

But before the knife could fall, Roger heard the door behind him swiftly unbolted, and someone came forward from the inner room.

"Good people all," said a voice, which, though it was feigned, made Roger start with surprise, "my master hath sent me to learn the cause of this uproar, and to pray you not to molest his trusty friend here, Master Sparowe. Whatsoever you desire, my master and I are ready to give you satisfaction."

A dead silence succeeded to the uproar. The crowd retreated in astonishment, and an open space was left between Roger and the new comer. Roger turned, and lo! at his elbow stood Will Somers himself, in his greasy jerkin and torn hose, his dirty steeple-crowned hat slouched over his face, in a vain attempt to conceal his features. But to escape detection was now impossible. The fugitive had deliberately walked into the very jaws of death.

"I pray you, good sir," he continued, addressing a man near him, "tell me the cause of this tumult. Whom have these people come hither to seek?"

"Why, thyself, young man, as it seemeth to me," answered the other shortly. "Art thou not serving man to a Cavalier who is in hiding here, and is not thy name Will Somers?"

"The same, at your service."

Roger's brain reeled. Had Wentworth and Walter lost their wits in this terrible crisis? Had they given up all hope of escape, and tamely allowed their carefully-guarded charge to thrust himself upon certain destruction? Or—or was it not Charles at all? This man was taller by two or three inches than Will Somers, and his voice, disguise it as he would, sounded strangely familiar. That trick of the broad, shapely shoulders—Roger had never seen it in any man before save his brother Walter.

No sooner had the speaker announced himself as Will Somers than there was an awful shout of execration. "'Tis he! 'Tis the very man! The Lord hath delivered him into our hands. Praised be the name of the Lord."

"Have at him! Tear him down! The sword of the Lord and of Gideon!"

But Roger flung himself between the crowd and their victim. "Sirs, stand back! Ye touch him not, save over my dead body. Hold back there. I love him not, this Charles Stuart. I am a Puritan as ye all know. But never shall it be said that Roger Sparowe suffered one to whom he had given shelter to be cut in pieces before his eyes."

A fearful struggle ensued. Half-a-dozen men flung themselves upon Roger, and tried, without actually injuring him, to drag him away. Behind them the surging, yelling crowd was fighting to get at the young serving man. Roger stood his ground with the strength of ten men, but inch by inch he was forced aside.

Suddenly someone in the press drew a pistol, aimed it deliberately at the false Will Somers, and fired. There was a loud report, a groan, and the sound of some one staggering back. With one mighty effort, Roger wrenched himself from the men's grasp, and flew to the wounded man, who was leaning against the door.

"Who is it?" he cried. "Art hurt, man? much hurt? Look up and speak. Oh, merciful God! 'tis thou, Walter!"

For at this moment the grey felt hat fell off, and Roger, in spite of his hastily cropped hair and ghastly features, recognized his brother. Walter put his hand to his side.

"Roger, 'tis all over with me," he whispered. "That shot went home. But call me Will Somers still. Let not the knaves know that they have not killed the King. Oh, God, the pain! Mother, oh, mother!"

Stupified with astonishment and horror, Roger forgot the crowd, which had subsided in an instant into ghastly silence. Scarcely knowing what he did, he burst open the door before him, and with superhuman strength half

led, half dragged Walter into the inner room, a track of blood marking the way.

"My brain reels," murmured the wounded man. "But go back, brother, and tell them I am hurt to death. They will disperse then. And, oh! say it is the King. If only none heard thee call me Walter."

Roger obeyed mechanically. He went back into the hall, and confronted the angry mob once more.

"Ye have done your work well," he said. "He that fired that shot had a true aim. The man who is wounded hath not an hour to live. Go your way, and rejoice that the Lord hath delivered him into your hands."

And therewith he turned from them into the room, and locked and doubly barred the door. Nevertheless there entered One with him, an awful unseen Presence, whom no bar or bolt could keep out.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE PRICE OF THE RANSOM.

WITH the help of three or four men of the household, Walter was brought into the wainscotted room, being quieter and cooler than the outer parlour. Here, swooning from loss of blood, he was laid on a huge settee, opposite the chimney corner and immediately facing the fatal recess, which was still open, no one having had time to close it.

Roger, who like many other gentlemen, had acquired a slight knowledge of surgery during the Civil War, bound up the wound and tried to staunch the blood. The first shock over, his nerves grew steady. He thought of everything. He eased his brother's position with cushions, applied restoratives, and hastily dispatched a servant for a doctor, half wondering at himself the while that, surrounded by such horrors, he could act in a calm and composed manner. Then he remembered his mother, and his hand shook as he was tying a bandage, at the thought that the fearful news must be broken to her. For the first time his courage failed him; he felt that he dared not do it himself.

Ill news travels fast, and Roger was not long kept in suspense. Suddenly, without a sound to announce her coming, Mistress Margaret glided into the room, and took her place beside Walter's couch. She did not speak, and her face, as she bent over her son, was almost as ghastly as his. Her eyes were bright and dry, and Roger was terrified at the strange, wild look in them; while her hand, when he touched it, was cold as marble.

The physician came at last, and made a careful examination of the wound. Mistress Margaret sat by in silence, helping him mechanically, and looking from

time to time piteously in his face, to read the verdict. Roger, who knew from the first what it must be, threw his arm round her to support her, but she put it gently back.

"Tell me," she said at last, in a low hollow voice, "will my son die?"

"Madam," answered the physician, "I grieve to say it, but man's skill avails not here. This poor gentleman hath not an hour to live. Is it verily Master Walter Sparowe, who hath come by his death in this strange fashion?"

Mistress Margaret shuddered, but did not speak. Roger laid his hand on the leech's arm, and said in a tone of agonized earnestness: "It is in truth, my brother, sir, whom you have known from a child. Can nothing be done? Beseech you to give us hope, if it be possible."

"It is not possible," returned the physician, "I can do nought for him. "If he hath anything on his mind, or there be any one he desires to see, it should be seen to forthwith."

At this moment there was a slight movement, and the sufferer slowly opened his eyes. "The King! Hath the King escaped?" he murmured, faintly; then perceiving that a stranger was beside him, he closed his eyes with a groan, muttering "Alone! Have they left me then? Oh, mother! Roger!"

"We are here, brother," answered Roger, gently, laying his cool hand on Walter's burning forehead; and Mistress Margaret leant forward, and tried to murmur a few soothing words. "This is the physician," continued Roger, "who hath come to ease thee of thy pain."

Walter opened his eyes again, and looked up at his brother. "Heard he what I said?" he asked, anxiously. "Good sir, I did but rave. In the anguish of my wound, I scarce know what I say."

"I doubt not but that you will be easier presently," said the physician, and at the words two tears trickled slowly down Mistress Margaret's cheeks, and fell on Walter's hand. He turned feebly to the doctor.

"I am hurt to death, then?" he asked. "Tell me truly, sir, I beseech you, how long I have to live."

There was a moment's silence before the physician answered, gravely: "Young sir, it is my duty to bid you prepare for death. I trust your peace hath been already made with God. If Christ be your stay and your confidence, you have nought to fear."

"Good sir, spare your exhortations," said the wounded man, feebly. "Roger," he continued, "by the brotherly love which was formerly between us, I crave two boons of thee. Deny me not."

Roger bent over the couch, and a great sob half choked his words. "Whatsoever thou wilt, brother, if it lie in my power, I will do it for thee. But oh, sir, the time is so short! An hour since he was lusty and well; is there no hope?"

"None in this world, Master Sparowe" answered the other, coldly. "As touching the world to come, your brother must make his own peace with it. If report saith true, he hath much whereof to unburden his conscience."

"I pray you, sir, to leave the charge of that to me," said Roger, with dignity.

"Good," replied the physician. "'Twas laid on me to bear my testimony. But since there lie now none but family matters between ye, suffer me to take my leave for this time. I will be here again."

He bowed to Mistress Margaret, but she did not look up. She seemed to be stunned, and oblivious of everything save her son. It was Joan who mixed the draught, and shifted the cushions, and shaded the light from the sick man's eyes, weeping piteously the while.

Roger came back, and knelt beside the couch. "What wouldest thou of me, Walter?" he asked, gently. "Is there aught I can do?"

"Brother," whispered Walter, eagerly, trying to clasp Roger's hand, "wilt thou forgive me now?"

"Oh, Walter, speak not of it. My hardness of heart hath shamed me. I sought occasion before to tell thee thou wast freely forgiven, and now it hath come to this."

"Better so," answered Walter, "an I do but die at peace with thee. Thou wilt not think bitterly of me when I am gone?"

"Never—never. Walter, thy words break my heart. 'Tis I to ask pardon of thee. I was the greater sinner. The Scripture saith, 'Until seventy times seven,' and I would not forgive thee once."

"Nay, all is now well between us. Peradventure thou wast harsh with me, but I deserved it. There is yet more" . . .

Roger thought the sick man was wandering, and checked him. "Tell me how thou camest to do this thing?" he asked, gently. "Thou didst not fling thy life away, because of the difference betwixt us?"

"No, 'twas contrived long since, planned with Ralph when we came hither. We thought but to gain time for the King, and not that it would lead to this. But it may be, I had not done it at the last save that I was desperate."

For a few moments there was no sound in the room, but Mistress Margaret's low moans and Roger's sobs.

"Wouldest thou nothing more, Walter," he asked, at last. "Let me do something for thee while I may."

The sick man roused himself. "If thou wouldest send for Master Sturges," he murmured, "and bid him come forthwith. Thou knowest him. He is one of us. There needs no concealment with him; tell him all. And, oh, Roger," he tried to raise himself on his elbow, but sank back with a groan, "I cannot die in peace till I know how it hath fared with the King. For the sake of the love that is renewed between us, send and have news of him."

Roger's brow darkened. "Small cause have we any of us to love him," he answered. "He hath cost us dear. Nevertheless," as Walter looked up imploring at him, "I will send as thou desirest, and thou shalt know whatever can be known. And Master Sturges shall be presently here."

As Roger left the room, and went across the great hall, now absolutely deserted, he felt himself plucked by the coat. Huddled against the door-way, and scarcely

to be distinguished in the deep shadow from the wall behind her, crouched the unhappy woman who had first given the alarm. Roger looked down, but he could see little more in this dark corner than a pair of fierce, bright eyes, and the gleam of a white arm.

"Master Sparowe!" she said, in a hoarse whisper, as he tried impatiently to free himself. "Master Sparowe, for the love of heaven, tell me how it fares with him. Will he live or die?"

"Woman, let me go," said Roger, roughly. "It is thou who hast worked all the mischief between us. But for thee, this terrible evil, perchance, had never befallen our house. Begone, I say, or my knaves shall chase thee hence."

"I cannot go until I know how it is with him," she answered, weeping. "If I have wronged him or thee, I beseech you pardon me. Wrong hath been done to me too—but no more of that. For the sake of the dear Christ, drive me not away. I will not enter. I will but stay here on the threshold, that I may have news of him from them that come and go. Sweet master, suffer me to remain."

Roger looked gloomily at her. "If he die—and he must die—thou wilt have caused his death as much as any of us. We have all done wrong—sore wrong. The Lord be merciful to us sinners. Remain, didst thou say? Yea, thou canst remain, if thou come no further."

Within the room the two, mother and son, were alone together for the last time. There was a moment yet for tender leaves-taking, and for a last heart-broken farewell. But Mistress Margaret said never a word. Only she gazed into her boy's dim eyes and ashen face, as if her strong love could bid defiance to death itself. And then—such little things attract our notice at a moment of supreme anguish—as she passed her hand tenderly over his fevered forehead, she missed the long brown curls.

"All gone, mother," said Walter, with a faint smile. "Ralph cut them with his dagger. Thou wilt never play with my curls any more. The King's head was cropped, and my curls had betrayed me."

Then he began to wander, and fancied himself a child at her knee, and prayed her not to be wroth with him, and cut his curls off, because he had been impatient over the dressing of them. And as his poor mind strayed further and further, the idea of the curls was always uppermost. In a fevered, fantastic way he took no count of the life he had given, but thought only of the bonny brown love locks he had sacrificed for his master. And Mistress Margaret knelt beside him, and though she had never seen anyone in delirium before, and shrank from the sight, she was calm and composed, and humoured him about the curls, and soothed him with prayers and tender words, as he was able to bear them.

Suddenly there was a sound of hasty footsteps in the outer room. Mistress Margaret, glancing up, with her finger on her lips, saw Roger and Master Sturges, and beyond them, through the open door, a woman, with a white face and wolfish eyes, peering into the room. The face gave her a thrill of nameless horror. She turned to Joan, who had entered with the men, and pointed to the door.

"'Tis a poor demented creature, mistress, who will not stir from thence. She saith she hath the master's leave to stay, and we cannot force her away."

Joan spoke between her sobs. She had never ceased sobbing since Walter was first carried in from the hall, but her grief did not prevent her from going about the business of the sick room with imperturbable steadiness.

As soon as he entered the room, and Roger had bolted the door behind him, Master Sturges advanced, deliberately took off his black velvet cap, and raising his hand said, solemnly: "Peace be to thee, my son, and to this house!"

Roused by the voice, Walter opened his eyes, but there was no answering look of recognition in them. His lips moved, and he began to babble feebly a few incoherent sentences. Master Sturges, or Father Martin rather, looked with a kind of horror at Mistress Margaret.

"Is it too late?" he asked. "Doth he not know me?"

For, doubtless, he had a special purpose in sending for me, and I dare do nothing without his free consent."

"Walter, lad, dost thou not know us?" cried Roger, desperately. "Rouse thee, brother. See, here is Master Sturges, whom thou didst ask for, and I have brought at much risk through the streets. He doth not hear me! Mother, canst thou do nothing?"

"He will revive," said Mistress Sparowe, quietly. "Patience, all of you. Stand back, and give him air. See now, my son, dost thou not remember good Master Sturges?"

Walter opened his eyes, and clasped his mother's hand. The priest stooped down and whispered: "'Tis I, Father Martin, Walter. Thou knowest me?"

"Surely, I know you," answered Walter, in a steadier voice. "Did I wander? My head groweth confused, but 'tis only for a moment. Oh, father, say, is the King safe?"

"I know not, my son, but we have sent a trusty messenger, who will bring us news of him. We shall presently have tidings. Meanwhile, hast thou nothing further to say to me?"

"An the King were safe!" murmured Walter. "Oh, if they have pursued him. Roger, thou hast not betrayed me? Thou hast not revealed that they shot at another, and not the King?"

"I have revealed nothing, brother," answered Roger. "But think no more of him thou callest the King. Consider thyself and the salvation of thy soul."

"Yea, my son," exhorted the Priest. "The time hath come for thee to put away all earthly thoughts. The care of thy soul is more precious now than even the King's life. Is there nought thou desirest of me?"

Walter gazed wistfully at him. "Father, thou knowest what I would have, if thou deem me worthy" . . .

The priest drew a crucifix from under his gown, and held it to the dying man's lips. "Swear upon this holy sign that thou dost repent thee of thy sins, and art in true union with our Holy Mother Church, and the last rites for the departing soul shall not be denied thee."

Roger sprang indignantly to his feet, and laid his hand roughly upon the priest's arm, but Father Martin shook it off. With a strength of which he had seemed incapable a moment before, Walter took the crucifix, and pressed it to his lips, then fixing his failing eyes upon the priest he said: "I swear, father. Grant me now absolution, that I may depart in peace."

"First declare thyself once more a member of our Holy Catholic Church, that none may think I take advantage of thy weakness."

"Oh, Walter, not that!" Roger burst out, with a cry of irrepressible pain. "Anything but that, brother. We are but newly reconciled, and wouldest thou put afresh a great gulf betwixt us? Thou art a Protestant, born and bred in our reformed faith. I beseech thee let me put this knavish priest from the room."

Father Martin turned to Roger, and held up his hand. "Sir, I pray you to leave Master Walter in peace. You have now no further concern with him. He hath been received into the communion of our Holy Church, and henceforth no heretic hath a right to intermeddle."

"He is no Catholic!" cried Roger, desperately. "We are no Papists, any of us. You shall not do him this deadly harm, and drag his soul to perdition, when he hath no strength to resist you. I will see justice done. Begone, sir priest, from this house!"

Roger might as well have spent his passion against a rock. Father Martin looked at him absolutely unmoved, with a faint smile on his lips.

"Your words come too late by a whole year, Master Sparowe. I drag no soul to perdition. Rather hath it been granted me to be the lowly instrument of snatching this soul from destruction. This is no thing of yesterday. Speak, my son, and tell him how it is with thee, and that thou art not a death-bed convert to our Holy Catholic faith."

Walter looked up at his brother, and even in this supreme moment he flinched from the wrath he saw in Roger's eyes.

"Roger, forgive me this last deceit," he murmured.

"I dared not tell thee. Thou wast so stern, so strict. Thou wouldest have driven me from the house, hadst thou known. And now . . . Brother, look not at me in anger. Let me die at peace with thee and all men."

Roger turned away, and covering his face with his hands groaned aloud. "Oh, Walter, what hast thou done? Thou hast deceived me, poor lad, but thou hast deceived thyself also. Now art thou doomed to eternal perdition, through the machinations of this crafty priest. Brother, aught else I could have borne, but this, that thou hast joined thyself to the enemies of the Lord, to the scarlet woman, to anti-Christ" . . .

Father Martin touched his arm. "Pardon me, Master Sparowe," he said with dignity, "but I cannot suffer you in my presence to speak thus of our Holy Mother, the Church. Nor hath any craft been used in this matter. Master Walter joined us of his own free will a twelve month since, as I have told you."

"Ye are all in league, everyone of you, to deceive me," cried Roger, with a burst of uncontrollable passion. "Thou too, mother" . . .

"Your pardon again," returned the priest. "Mistress Margaret knew nought of this business. I gave her to understand that I was a priest of the reformed faith, and as such she welcomed me here. Our Holy Church bids us wear many disguises, but the end justifieth the means. Enough of these worldly matters. Master Sparowe, your brother hath not many minutes to live. I pray you, nay, I desire you to withdraw, that I may administer the last ghostly consolations to him. The Church suffers none to depart out of this world unshriven and unabsolved. Even you, I take it, would scarce wish him to die without spiritual comfort."

Roger turned upon the priest a look full of rage and hatred. Father Martin answered it with the same deadly composure he had maintained throughout. Bending over Walter, Roger asked: "Dost thou wish it, Walter? Shall I leave thee for this priest to work his will on thee? I will not go unless thou bid me."

"Go," whispered Walter, feebly. "For a few minutes,

brother, I would be alone with him. And, oh I bring me news of the King when thou hast it."

With a sigh wrung from the very depths of his heart, Roger left the room, so absorbed in his grief, that for the moment he did not even think of his mother. During the scene Mistress Margaret had sat with her hand in Walter's, a passive, perhaps an unconscious spectator. She betrayed no surprise when Walter announced himself a Catholic, and Father Martin was obliged to raise her gently from her chair, before he could make her understand that she, too, must leave the room.

In the outer hall the woman still crouched by the threshold of the door. She looked up wistfully at mother and son as they passed her, but she dared not speak. And indeed there was no need to ask for tidings from the sick room; hopelessness was written on every face.

Mistress Margaret sank into the chair Joan placed for her and sat motionless, as she had sat all the morning, only now and then making a feeble movement with her hand, as if she was still caressing Walter's sunny curls. Joan stood beside her mistress, and murmured over and over again, as if she were repeating a kind of charm: "I knew 'twould be thus; I knew it from the moment he crossed the threshold left foot first. Ah, my bonny lad! and he to go left foot first. The next time 'twill be in his coffin."

Roger leant against the lattice window, idly watching the scene before him. He was half-maddened with grief. Within there, Walter, his only brother Walter, lay a dying. Dying a hero's death, but dying in communion with a church which Roger held to be worse than atheism. Terrible as had been the constraint he had put upon himself the last few days, nothing equalled the horror of the discovery that his own brother was a Papist.

The pause did not last long. The door was soon thrown open again, and Father Martin beckoned Roger forward.

"He hath something more on his mind, poor boy, which he would fain say to you," he whispered. "And

his mother," for Mistress Margaret had looked up at sight of the priest, "she must come, too, He will not last long now, I fear."

The priest was right. The moment he reached his brother, Roger saw that ashen look on his face which none can ever mistake. And at the sight all his anger at Walter's perfidy, his idle life, his unrepented sins, vanished, and a mighty tide of love and sorrow filled his heart. He took his brother's cold hand, and tried once more to bring a look of recollection into his dim eyes.

"Walter, what is it?" he asked gently. "Hast ought more to speak of to me? Is there anything further whereof thou wouldest ease thy mind?"

"The woman," answered Walter, speaking with difficulty, "She whom thou wottest of. They must not starve, Roger, she and hers. I have money—money which thou wilt now inherit of me. Let her have it, as much as is fitting. And oh, brother! 'tis my last prayer to thee," Walter roused himself for a final effort, "tell not my mother of it. Keep the knowledge from her, as thou canst do. Roger, forgive me."

"As I hope myself to be forgiven, Walter. The Lord receive us both to His everlasting mercy, though we come to it by ways so diverse. Fear not! I will do all that thou canst wish. But oh! to lose thee in such a cause."

"No man can die in a nobler cause," spoke Father Martin from the foot of the couch. "Walter hath given himself for him who is most precious to all of us—our King. My son, thou hast laid down thy life in this sacred cause, and the sacrifice is accepted."

A faint smile lit up Walter's face. "Ah, if it were so!" he sighed. "But the King! the King! I cannot die until I know that the King hath escaped."

At this moment there was a sound of voices in the next room. Joan hurried to the door, but Roger was before her. Opening, he beckoned to someone who stood without, and the next moment admitted a man booted and spurred, bespattered with mud, and hot with the haste of the journey.

"Dost thou bring news?" asked Roger, cautiously.

Before the man could answer, there was a cry from the couch, and Walter, raising himself on his elbow, gasped: "Let him come hither. Speak, man. The King! Hath the King escaped?"

"He hath," answered the man. "He is far on his journey to the West. There was no pursuit. Ere now, he hath ridden twenty miles from hence."

"Now God be praised!" exclaimed Walter; then, as he sank back a moment after, he murmured: "Mary, mother of God, have mercy on me! Brother, thy hand. Kiss me, mother. The King hath escaped! the King hath escaped!"

And before Roger could realise that the end had come, Walter Sparowe, with a smile on his lips, had passed away.

CHAPTER XV.

THE END.

THE mourners were still standing round the couch, scarcely able to believe that their care was no longer needed, when the silence was rudely broken. There was a sound of noisy wrangling in the great hall, and a voice peremptorily demanding admittance. In terror lest the mistake had been discovered, and the mob had returned to complete their vengeance, Roger tore himself from the room, and went out. Two or three of his men, with white, terrified faces, were standing in front of the entrance door which, already battered, and half-torn from its hinges, they had been unable to keep closed. Upon the threshold stood Master Burroughs, more arrogant, more self important, than Roger had ever seen him before.

"What meaneth this, Master Sparowe?" he cried, indignantly, as soon as he caught sight of Roger. "I come to pay you a peaceable visit, and these knaves here assault me, and forbid the way, as though I meant to do you an injury. 'Tis the first time that ever your door was shut against me, and I trow it shall be the last. Marry, I came hither to give you a word of friendly warning, but, an I am thus roughly handled, I will hence, and lodge my complaint in the right quarter."

"The warning is not needed, good Master Burroughs," said Roger, in a low voice. "You have not heard then of that which hath befallen us?"

"Heard, ay, I have heard enough," answered the angry Puritan. "I have heard that which mine ears can scarce credit, Master Sparowe. That you, whom I took to be a godly servant of the Lord, have here in hiding that arch rebel himself, Charles Stuart. Fie on you for an arrogant hypocrite, I say."

"He is here no longer," replied Roger, quietly. "And I pray you, sir, seek some more convenient season for your visit and your reproaches. We can ill bear the presence of any stranger to-day."

"Doubtless my presence is unwelcome," returned Master Burroughs, with a bitter smile. "But I would have you observe, good sir, that there can never be peace in this house so long as your mother and your brother" . . .

"Hold!" cried Roger, peremptorily. "Sir, cease your railings; they avail no longer. Suffer me, I pray you, to withdraw."

He turned and would have left the hall, but Master Burroughs, hurrying after him as fast as his portly dignity would allow, laid his hand on his arm, and said: "Softly, my son. You speak in riddles. Hath aught happened that I know not of, to make you so strange of mood to-day? Methinks I should have been told thereof on entering."

As Roger did not answer, the old man turned to the servants. "Ho, you knaves! Come hither, one of you, and tell me what hath befallen. Your master seemeth half distraught, and the door is broken, and . . . ah, what is this?"

At this moment Master Burroughs' voluble talk was interrupted by the sight of a stain, a hideous, unmistakable blood stain on the floor. The men crowded round to look. Roger leant back over against the wall with a groan, and put his hand over his eyes.

"'Twas here they shot him," said one of the men in an awe-struck whisper. "Look you, what a pool it made!"

"Ay, 'tis his heart's blood."

"Shot him! Shot whom?" cried Master Burroughs, stamping his foot impatiently. "Speak out, men. Are ye all spell-bound, like your master?"

The men looked at each other, and then at Roger. "'Twas a mob that came hither," said one of them.

"Ay, and raised a tumult," continued another, "and we held the door until they burst it open."

"A mob! a tumult! and wherefore?" asked the Puritan.

"They came to seek some man who was in hiding here, they said," answered two or three at once, "but we knew of none such, save Master Wentworth and his man. And as they were like to have killed his honour, Master Walter came forth in strange clothes" . . .

"Like to those the serving lad wore when he came," suggested another, and then there was a long pause.

"Walter came forth, did he?" said Master Burroughs nodding his head sagely. "Ha, ha! As I had thought. And then . . . and then" . . .

"They shot at him," said one of the men, in a tone of horror.

"Shot at him, man? Come, look up and speak out. Did they hurt him?"

Roger moved to go, but Master Burroughs stopped him again. "Tarry, my son. I must sift this matter to the bottom," he said, pompously. "Mine office demands it. The Council of State will send to inquire concerning it, and I must be ready with the information. How could such a tumult befall, and no notice thereof given to me?"

There was a dead silence. Master Burroughs looked at the men, and singling out one of them, said, angrily, "Sirrah, speak and tell me what happened. Who stayed the mob? And Master Walter, was he wounded?"

"He is dead!"

Master Burroughs looked incredulously at the speaker. "Dead! how could that be? Why I saw him here yesterday, alive and well, had sight of him at a window as I rode off. Roger, lad, speak, and give this foolish knave the lie."

But Roger did not speak, and even Master Burroughs grew appalled at the ominous silence.

"Not our handsome Walter!" he cried, suddenly. "Not the merry boy whom I dandled on my knee in his father's time, and played with his pretty curls. My son, say it is not Walter."

"It is Walter," answered Roger, in a hollow voice. "He hath given his life for him whom he called his

King. Whether he were right or wrong God alone knoweth, who hath taken him from us."

"Oh, lad! oh, Roger! and I was harsh with thee when thou wast in such grief. How could it be? How went the matter? Tell me, prithee, some of you."

Now that their master had spoken, the tongues of the men were loosened, and they began to give circumstantial and sometimes conflicting accounts of the tumult, adding the most extravagant details. Suddenly Roger held up his hand, and said: "Peace, good fellows. Here, at such a time, much talk is unseemly. I thank you for all the good service rendered me this day. It shall not be forgotten. Now let every man get to his work. Master Burroughs," he turned with an effort to the Puritan, "pardon my discourtesy. I scarce know what I say, but 'twould disturb my mother if you came further. Suffer me here to bid you farewell."

"Hold, my son," said Master Burroughs. "I cannot part thus from thee. Tell me how fares it with thy poor mother. And, oh! if my sharp words have grieved thee, forgive me. I knew not when I came that the Lord hath laid his hand so heavily on thee."

"The Lord's hand hath lain heavily on me for many a day," answered Roger, wearily. "Doubtless 'tis for my sins that he hath thus afflicted me. Trouble and sorrow are no new thing to me, but this blow toucheth me nearly."

"And thy poor mother?"

"She hath not moved, nor spoken, nor wept," answered Roger, in a half-frightened tone, "though she wept much when my father died. She is as cold and quiet as" . . . he stopped, with a shudder.

"Some one must be with her," said Master Burroughs, shaking his head. "These tender women are not able to bear up alone against such a stress of trouble. I have heard Alice say so many a time. Hath she no friend, no kinswoman, who might be with her?"

"Friends hath she in plenty, but not such as would help her at this pass. And her kinsfolk are all far distant, in London and in the North. None of them could come."

"But some one must thou have, to aid thee with her, my poor lad, and thou art not fit to give much comfort thyself. Women at such a time are more helpful than men. Would she suffer mine Alice, think you? The girl hath a rare gift for comfort."

The gleam of almost wild joy which lighted up Roger's haggard face for a moment was answer sufficient that, to one member at least of that grief-stricken household, Alice would be a ministering angel.

"Oh, if she could come!" he sighed. "But it is far, and the days grow short. And 'tis no fit house to bring a blythe young maiden to, like Mistress Alice."

"Alice taketh no thought for her own comfort when there is trouble in a house," answered Master Burroughs. "Oft have I heard her say that she would sooner go to a house of mourning than of mirth. She shall be here before nightfall; myself will bring her, and the Lord grant her to help thy poor mother."

It was not till the close of the day that a true version of what had happened in "Sparowe's house" began to circulate in the town. For some hours Walter's artifice succeeded. It was positively affirmed by all the rioters that Charles Stuart himself, the man of sin, had at last been given over into the hands of his enemies, and was lying dead or dying in the Old House. Roger's declaration that the man was wounded to death, the close quarters at which the fight had occurred, and the sight a few of the rioters had obtained of the wounded man, as he was carried away, were so many convincing proofs that he could not have escaped with his life. No domiciliary visit from a Magistrate or other official was thought necessary under the circumstances, nor was it considered seemly to disturb the dying man's last hours. The corporation contented themselves with setting a close watch round the house, to prevent the body from being carried off, in which they were aided by the soldiers, who had arrived from Colchester too late to be of other use. Satisfied with these precautionary measures, the authorities remained quiet till the evening. No pursuit was made after the real fugitives, and by the time the

mistake was discovered, Wentworth and his companion were already many miles on their way westward.

As the day wore on doubts, originating no one knew whence, began to be whispered about the town, that "mob justice" had not this time been real justice after all. Vague rumours were afloat of a dire tragedy which had befallen the Sparowes. And at last it was judged expedient to clear up these shifting reports, and to set the matter finally at rest. Accordingly a justice of the peace was deputed to go to the "Old House," attended by a physician and a notary, to attest that the body now known to be lying there was actually that of Charles Stuart, the late King of Scots.

The revulsion of feeling that ensued when the truth was known surprised even Roger himself, little as he was accustomed to take count of such matters. For some time he had been aware of a growing bitterness in the town against him and his family. Mistress Margaret's dainty town-bred ways, and staunch adherence to the proscribed Church, had always been a stumbling block to the godly Puritan dames of Ipswich. And when it was known that her younger son was following in her steps, and was even more popishly inclined than his mother, nothing but respect for the name of Sparowe prevented the virtual ostracism of the whole family.

Of late, too, it had been darkly hinted that a priest had actually been seen, in broad daylight, standing at one of the upper windows of the house, and old people recalled a dim tradition of their youth that a chapel, in some mysterious way, formed part of the Old House. At the meetings of the town council, Roger had often been obliged to bear angry looks and frowns, sharp words, and threatening hints; and the knowledge that, through no fault of his own, he was suspected of complicity in practices he reprobated as heartily as any Puritan could do, had added another to his many burdens.

All this was changed in a moment. Each man in the town felt himself, in some way, personally implicated in the riot, and everyone was thrilled with horror at the

terrible result of it. The tide turned suddenly. The name of Sparowe, but a short time since a bye-word for reproach, was extolled to the skies. People even talked of sending a deputation to Roger to condole with him, and were scarcely to be deterred from it. Perhaps the best way, after all, of showing their sympathy was by respecting, as everyone in the town did, the rigid seclusion in which Roger buried himself. For a whole month after Walter's death, a long time in those stirring, active days, when there was so much to do, and so few to do it, he was allowed to indulge his grief in the quiet of the Old House.

The matter was of necessity reported to head-quarters, and the Council of State sent down a Commission from London to inquire into it. They had orders, if his guilt could be proved, to commit Master Roger Sparowe to prison, for harbouring Malignants. But the Borough authorities gave so moving an account of the affair that the Commissioners, after much talking and consulting, went back to London without troubling Roger with a single question. And in such wise did they place all the circumstances before the Council of State that the matter was dropped, with the more reason because certain intelligence was soon after received, that Charles had escaped to France from the South Coast.

All this and much more kind feeling, the very existence of which Roger had never suspected, he began to find out, when he showed himself again in the streets of his native town. And he discovered, to his surprise, that, with the fickle townsfolk, the process of canonizing his brother had already commenced. Poor Walter, in spite of his faults and short-comings, had always been a favourite with them, and they were now disposed to look upon him as a martyr, half against his will, to his erring but heroic principles. The popular indignation fell upon Charles, to whom, now safe in France, it did not matter a jot; and he was openly stigmatized as a coward and a villain, who had allowed another man to sacrifice his life in his stead.

It was remarked, however, by those who observed him

closely, that Master Sparowe, though he was worn and pale, and more haggard than many a man of double his years, had yet a far more peaceful look, since his brother's death, than anyone had ever seen in him before. His brows were no longer contracted, his lips no longer trembled as they used to do. His face was sad but calm. For the terrible weight which had oppressed Roger for the last year was gone. Never again, so he hoped and believed, would there be any concealment between him and his mother. Never again would he be forced to shrink from the sight of his fellow-citizens, oppressed with the weight of a terrible secret which was none of his choosing. Peace had come, though purchased at a fearful cost, and all the dissembling and equivocation which had tried him more than open warfare, were buried in poor Walter's grave.

There was another reason for the peace and content which everyone, to their astonishment, read in Roger's face. For the first time in his life, the silent, lonely man, had found some one to understand him. Alice Burroughs had shared this month of seclusion with him and his mother, contenting herself with hasty visits from time to time to Mote End, to look after her poor sick folk. And during this month Roger had entered upon an altogether new experience. He had learnt what help and comfort a true-hearted woman can give to a man. Life without Alice had seemed difficult before; he knew that from henceforth it would be impossible. All those qualities in which he felt himself to be deficient he found in her. As if—so at least he thought—her character completed and filled out his own; as if it was granted to them to realise the perfect harmony of two natures, which poets dream of, but to which so few attain.

Something approximating very nearly to this perfect union Roger did nevertheless achieve, when, after a year of waiting, insisted on, no one quite knew why, by Kezia and Master Burroughs, he brought Alice at last to the fair and stately house which was henceforth to be her home. There had long ceased to be any question

whether Mistress Margaret should live with them or not. Between her and Alice, between the mother without a daughter, and the girl who had grown to womanhood without a mother, there had sprung up a love so deep and touching, that even Kezia allowed it might be well not to separate them. For Mistress Margaret was never the same after the tragedy of Walter's death. She became suddenly and prematurely old. Her bright spirits, and the singular youthfulness of face and mind which had characterized her vanished when her youngest and best-loved child was laid in his grave. Her hair turned white; she grew feeble and quiet, and though as sweet tempered as ever, she would sometimes chide her son and daughter if they left her long alone. She clung to Roger, and to the wife who was scarcely less dear to her than he, with a wistful tenderness which was inexpressibly touching.

Two winters after, when all England was astir with the news that the great General had consented to become Lord Protector of the Commonwealth, there came a stir, too, into the quiet household at Ipswich. Mistress Margaret had been failing sadly of late, but she lived to see that the good old name of Sparowe was not to die out, as she had often feared. And when Alice and Roger's first-born child was put into her arms, she laid down willingly the burden of life, which had grown so heavy for her.

And with her last breath she prayed her children to call the boy—Walter.

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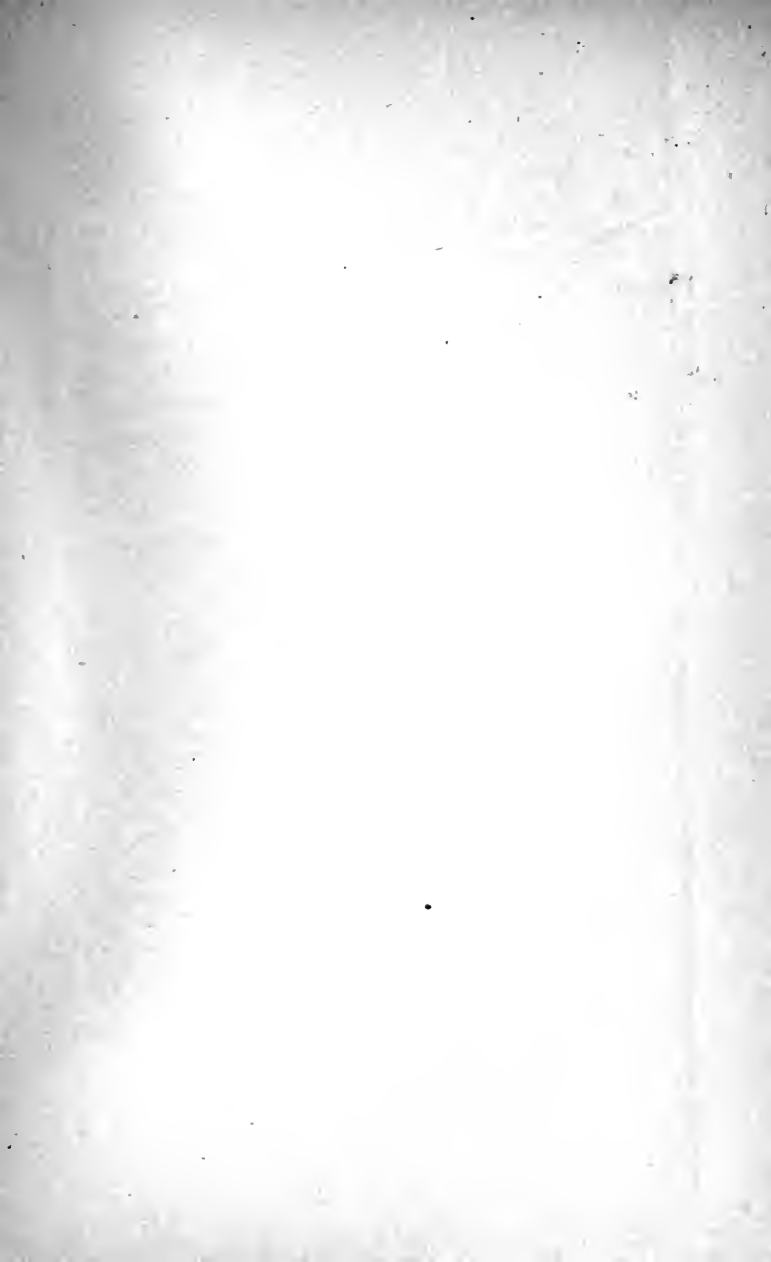
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